

THE HOUSE
OF JOY



THE HOUSE
OF JOY

BY LAURENCE
HOUSMAN

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THE PRINCE WITH THE NINE
SORROWS

TO
CLARE AND IDA

A

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



THE PRINCE WITH THE NINE SORROWS

*Eight white peahens went down to the gate :
"Wait !" they said, "little sister, wait !"
They covered her up with feathers so fine ;
And none went out, when there went back nine.*



LONG time ago there lived a King and a Queen, who had an only son. As soon as he was born his mother gave him to the forester's wife to be nursed ; for she herself had to wear her crown all day and had no time for nursing. The forester's wife had just given birth to a little daughter of her own ; but she loved both children equally and nursed them together like twins.

One night the Queen had a dream that made the half of her hair turn grey. She dreamed that she saw the Prince her son at the age of twenty lying dead with a wound

over the place of his heart ; and near him his foster-sister was standing, with a royal crown on her head, and his heart bleeding between her hands.

The next morning the Queen sent in great haste for the family Fairy, and told her of the dream. The Fairy said, " This can have but one meaning, and it is an evil one. There is some danger that threatens your son's life in his twentieth year, and his foster-sister is to be the cause of it ; also, it seems she is to make herself Queen. But leave her to me, and I will avert the evil chance ; for the dream coming beforehand shows that the Fates mean that he should be saved."

The Queen said, " Do anything ; only do not destroy the forester's wife's child, for as yet at least, she has done no wrong. Let her only be carried away to a safe place and made secure and treated well. I will not have my son's happiness grow out of another one's grave."

The Fairy said, " Nothing is so safe as a grave when the Fates are awake. Still, I think I can make everything quite safe within reason, and leave you as clean as well as a quiet conscience."

The little Prince and the forester's daughter grew up together till they were a year old ; then, one day, when their nurse came to look for them, the Prince was found, but his foster-sister was lost ; and though the search for her was long, she was never seen again, nor could any trace of her be found.

The baby Prince pined and pined, and was so sorrowful over her loss that they feared for a time that he was going to die. But his foster-mother, in spite of her grief over her own child's disappearance, nursed him so well and loved him so much that after a while he recovered his strength.

Then the forester's wife gave birth to another daughter, as if to console herself for the loss of the first. But the same night that the child was born the Queen had just the same dream over again. She dreamed that she saw her son lying dead at the age of twenty ; and there was the wound in his breast, and the forester's daughter was standing by with his heart in her hand and a royal crown upon her head.

The poor Queen's hair had gone quite white when she sent again for the family Fairy, and told her how the dream had

repeated itself. The Fairy gave her the same advice as before, quieting her fears, and assuring her that however persistent the Fates might be in threatening the Prince's life, all in the end should be well.

Before another year was passed the second of the forester's daughters had disappeared; and the Prince and his foster-mother cried themselves ill over a loss that had been so cruelly renewed. The Queen, seeing how great were the sorrow and the love that the Prince bore for his foster-sisters, began to doubt in her heart and say, "What have I done? Have I saved my son's life by taking away his heart?"

Now every year the same thing took place, the forester's wife giving birth to a daughter, and the Queen on the same night having the same fearful dream of the fate that threatened her son in his twentieth year; and afterwards the family Fairy would come, and then one day the forester's wife's child would disappear, and be heard of no more.

At last when nine daughters in all had been born to the forester's wife and lost to her when they were but a year old, the Queen fell very ill. Every day she grew

weaker and weaker, and the little Prince came and sat by her, holding her hand and looking at her with a sorrowful face. At last one night (it was just a year after the last of the forester's children had disappeared) she woke suddenly, stretching out her arms and crying. "Oh, Fairy," she cried, "the dream, the dream!" And covering her face with her hands, she died.

The little Prince was now more than ten years old, and the very saddest of mortals. He said that there were nine sorrows hidden in his heart, of which it could not get rid; and that at night, when all the birds went home to roost, he heard cries of lamentation and pain; but whether these came from very far away, or out of his own heart he could not tell.

Yet he grew slenderly and well, and had such grace and tenderness in his nature that all who saw him loved him. His foster-mother, when he spoke to her of his nine sorrows, tried to comfort him, calling him her own nine joys; and, indeed, he was all the joy left in life for her.

When the Prince neared his twentieth year, the King his father felt that he himself was becoming old and weary of life.

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When the Prince neared his twentieth year, the King his father felt that he himself was becoming old and weary of life.

“I shall not live much longer,” he thought : “very soon my son will be left alone in the world. It is right, therefore, now that he should know what is the danger that threatens his life.” For till then the Prince had not known anything ; all had been kept a secret between the Queen and the King and the family Fairy.

The old King knew of the Prince’s nine sorrows, and often he tried to believe that they came by chance, and had nothing to do with the secret that sat at the root of his son’s life. But now he feared more and more to tell the Prince the story of those nine dreams, lest the knowledge should indeed serve but as the crowning point of his sorrows, and altogether break his heart for him.

Yet there was so much danger in leaving the thing untold that at last he summoned the Prince to his bedside, meaning to tell him all. The King had worn himself so ill with anxiety and grief in thinking over the matter, that now to tell all was the only means of saving his life.

The Prince came and knelt down, and leaned his head on his father’s pillow ; and the King whispered into his ear the story

of the dreams, and of how for his sake all the Prince's foster-sisters had been spirited away.

Before his tale was done he could no longer bear to look into his son's face, but closed his eyes, and, with long silences between, spoke as one who prayed.

When he had ended he lay quite still, and the Prince kissed his closed eyelids and went softly out of the room.

"Now I know," he said to himself; "now at last!" And he came through the wood and knocked at his foster-mother's door. "Other mother," he said to her, "give me a kiss for each of my sisters, for now I am going out into the world to find them, to be rid of the sorrows in my heart."

"They can never be found!" she cried, but she kissed him nine times. "And this," she said, "was Monica, and this was Ponica, and this was Veronica," and so she went over every name. "But now they are only names!" she wept, as she let him go.

He went along, and he went along, and he went along. "Where may you be going to, fair sir?" asked an old peasant

at whose cabin the Prince sought shelter when night came to the first day of his wanderings. "Truly," answered the Prince, "I do not know how far or whither I need to go ; but I have a finger-post in my heart that keeps pointing me."

So that night he stayed there, and the next day he went on.

"Where to so fast?" asked a wood-cutter when the second night found him in the thickest and loneliest parts of the forest. "Here the night is so dark and the way so dangerous, one like you should not go alone."

"Nay, I know nothing," said the Prince, "only I feel like a weather-cock in a wind that keeps turning me to its will !"

After many days he came to a small long valley rich in woods and water-courses, but no road ran through it. More and more it seemed like the world's end, a place unknown, or forgotten of its old inhabitants. Just at the end of the valley, where the woods opened into clear slopes and hollows toward the west, he saw before him, low and overgrown, the walls of a little tumble-down grange. "There," he said to himself when he saw it, "I can find

shelter for to-night. Never have I felt so tired before, or such a pain at my heart !”

Before long he came to a little gate and a winding path that led in among lawns and trees to the door of an old house. The house seemed as if it had been once lived in, but there was no sign of any life about it now. He pushed open the door, and suddenly there was a sharp rustling of feathers, and nine white peahens rose up from the ground and flew out of the window into the garden.

The Prince searched the whole house over, and found it a mere ruin ; the only signs of life to be seen were the white feathers that lifted and blew about over the floors.

Outside, the garden was gathering itself together in the dusk, and the peahens were stepping daintily about the lawns, picking here and there between the blades of grass. They seemed to suit the gentle sadness of the place, which had an air of grief that has grown at ease with itself.

The Prince went out into the garden, and walked about among the quietly stepping birds ; but they took no heed of

him. They came picking up their food between his very feet, as though he were not there. Silence held all the air, and in the cleft of the valley the day drooped to its end.

Just before it grew dark, the nine white peahens gathered together at the foot of a great elm, and lifting up their throats they wailed in chorus. Their lamentable cry touched the Prince's heart ; "where," he asked himself, "have I heard such sorrow before?" Then all with one accord the birds sprang rustling up to the lowest boughs of the elm, and settled themselves to roost.

The Prince went back to the house, to find some corner amid its half-ruined rooms to sleep in. But there the air was close, and an unpleasant smell of moisture came from the floor and walls : so, the night being warm, he returned to the garden, and folding himself in his cloak lay down under the tree where the nine peahens were at roost.

For a long time he tried to sleep, but could not, there was so much pain and sorrow in his heart.

Presently when it was close upon mid-

night, over his head one of the birds stirred and ruffled through all its feathers ; and he heard a soft voice say :

“ Sisters, are you awake ? ”

All the other peahens lifted their heads, and turned toward the one that spoke, saying, “ Yes, sister, we are awake. ”

Then the first one said again, “ Our brother is here. ”

They all said, “ He is our enemy ; it is for him that we endure this sorrow. ”

“ To-night, ” said the first, “ we may all be free. ”

They answered, “ Yes, we may all be free ! Who will go down and peck out his heart ? Then we shall be free. ”

And the first who had spoken said, “ I will go down ! ”

“ Do not fail, sister ! ” said all the others. “ For if you fail you can speak to us no more. ”

The first peahen answered, “ Do not fear that I shall fail ! ” And she began stepping down the long boughs of the elm.

The Prince lying below heard all that was said. “ Ah ! poor sisters, ” he thought, “ have I found you at last ; and are all

these sorrows brought upon you for me?" And he unloosed his doublet, and opened his vest, making his breast bare for the peahen to come and peck out his heart.

He lay quite still with his eyes shut, and when she reached the ground the peahen found him lying there, as it seemed to her fast asleep, with his white breast bare for the stroke of her beak.

Then so fair he looked to her, and so gentle in his youth, that she had pity on him, and stood weeping by his side, and laying her head against his, whispered, "O, brother, once we lay as babes together and were nursed at the same breast! How can I peck out your heart?"

Then she stole softly back into the tree, and crouched down again by her companions. They said to her, "Our minute of midnight is nearly gone. Is there blood on your beak! Have you our brother's heart for us?" But the other answered never a word.

In the morning the peahens came rustling down out of the elm, and went searching for fat carnation buds and anemone seeds among the flower-beds in the garden. To the Prince they showed no sign either of

hatred or fear, but went to and fro carelessly, pecking at the ground about his feet. Only one came with drooping head and wings, and sleeked itself to his caress, and the Prince, stooping down, whispered in her ear, "O, sister, why did you not peck out my heart."

At night, as before, the peahens all cried in chorus as they went up into the elm; and the Prince came and wrapped himself in his cloak, and lay down at the foot of it to watch.

At midnight the eight peahens lifted their heads, and said, "Sister, why did you fail last night?" But their sister gave them not a word.

"Alas!" they said, "now she has failed, unless one of us succeed we shall never hear her speak with her human voice again. Why is it that you weep so," they said again, "now when deliverance is so near?" For the poor peahen was shaken with weeping, and her tears fell down in loud drops upon the ground.

Then the next sister said, "I will go down! He is asleep. Be certain, I will not fail!" So she climbed softly down the tree, and the Prince opened his shirt and

laid his breast bare for her to come and take out his heart.

Presently she stood by his side, and when she saw him, she too had pity on him for the youth and kindness of his face. And once she shut her eyes, and lifted her head for the stroke ; but then weakness seized her, and she laid her head softly upon his heart and said, "Once the breast that gave me milk gave milk also to you. You were my sister's brother, and she spared you : so how can I peck out your heart ?" And having said this she went softly back into the tree, and crouched down again among her sisters.

They said to her, "Have you blood upon your beak ? Is his heart ours ?" But she answered them no word.

The next day the two sisters, who because their hearts betrayed them had become mute, followed the Prince wherever he went, and stretched up their heads to his caress. But the others went and came indifferently, careless except for food ; for until midnight their human hearts were asleep ; only now the two sisters who had given their voices away had regained their human hearts perpetually.

That night the same thing happened as before. "Sisters," said the youngest, "to-night I will go down, since the two eldest of us have failed. My wrong is fresher in my heart than theirs! Be sure I shall not fail!" So the youngest peahen came down from the tree, and the Prince laid his heart bare for her beak, but the bird could not find the will to peck it out. And so it was the next night, and the next, until eight nights were gone.

So at last only one peahen was left. At midnight she raised her head, saying, "Sisters, are you awake?"

They all turned, and gazed at her weeping, but could say no word.

Then she said, "You have all failed, having all tried but me. Now if I fail we shall remain mute and captive for ever, more undone by the loss of our last remaining gift of speech than we were at first. But I tell you, dear sisters, I will not fail; for the happiness of you all lies with me now!"

Then she went softly down the tree; and one by one they all went following her, and weeping, to see what the end would be.

They stood some way apart, watching

with upturned heads, and their poor throats began catching back a wish to cry as the little peahen, the last of the sisters, came and stood by the Prince.

Then she, too, looked in his face, and saw the white breast made bare for her beak ; and the love of him went deep down into her heart. And she tried and tried to shut her eyes and deal the stroke, but could not.

She trembled and sighed, and turned to look at her sisters, where they all stood weeping silently together. "They have spared him," she said to herself: "why should not I?"

But the Prince, seeing that she, too, was about to fail like the rest of them, turned and said, as if in his sleep, "Come, come, little peahen, and peck out my heart!"

At that she turned back again to him, and laid her head down upon his heart and cried more sadly than them all.

Then he said, "You have eight sisters, and a mother who cries for her children to return!" Yet still she thought he was dreaming, and speaking only in his sleep. The other peahens came no nearer, but stood weeping silently. She looked from

him to them. "O," she cried, "I have a wicked heart, to let one stand in the way of mine!" Then she threw up her neck and cried lamentably with her peafowl's voice, wishing that the Prince would wake up and see her, and so escape. And at that all the other peahens lifted up their heads and wailed with her: but the Prince never turned, nor lifted a finger, nor uttered a sound.

Then she drew in a deep breath, and closed her eyes fast. "Let my sisters go, but let me be as I am!" she cried; and with that she stooped down, and pecked out his heart.

All her sisters shrieked as their human shapes returned to them. "O, sister! O, wicked little sister!" they cried, "What have you done!"

The little white peahen crouched close down to the side of the dead Prince. "I loved him more than you all!" she tried to say: but she only lifted her head, and wailed again and again the peafowl's cry.

The Prince's heart lay beating at her feet, so glad to be rid of its nine sorrows that mere joy made it live on, though all the rest of the body lay cold.

The peahen leaned down upon the Prince's breast, and there wailed without ceasing : till suddenly, piercing with her beak her own breast, she drew out her own living heart and laid it in the place where his had been.

And, as she did so, the wound where she had pierced him closed and became healed ; and her heart was, as it were, buried in the Prince's breast. In her death agony she could feel it there, her own heart leaping within his breast for joy.

The Prince, who had seemed to be dead, flushed from head to foot as the warmth of life came back to him ; with one deep breath he woke, and found the little white peahen lying as if dead between his arms.

Then he laughed softly and rose (his goodness making him wise), and taking up his own still beating heart he laid it into the place of hers. At the first beat of it within her breast, the peahen became transformed as all her sisters had been, and her own maiden form came back to her. And the pain and the wound in her breast grew healed together, so that she stood up alive and well in the Prince's arms.

“ Dear heart ! ” said he : and “ Dear,

dear heart !” said she ; but whether they were speaking of their own hearts or of each other’s, who can tell ? for which was which they themselves did not know.

Then all round was so much embracing and happiness that it is out of reach for tongue or pen to describe. For truly the Prince and his foster-sisters loved each other dearly, and could put no bounds upon their present contentment. As for the Prince and the one who had plucked out his heart, of no two was the saying ever more truly told, that they had lost their hearts to each other ; nor was ever love in the world known before that carried with it such harmony as theirs.

And so it all came about according to the Queen’s dream that the forester’s daughter wore the royal crown upon her head, and held the Prince’s heart in her hand.

Long before he died the old King was made happy because the dream that he had feared so much had become true : and the forester’s wife was happy before she died : and as for the Prince and his wife and his foster-sisters, they were all rather happy : and none of them is dead yet.

THE LUCK OF THE ROSES

TO
CLEMENCE



THE LUCK OF THE ROSES



NOT far from a great town, in the midst of a well-wooded valley, lived a rose-gardener and his wife. All round the old home green sleepy hollows lay girdled by silver streams, long grasses bent softly in the wind, and the half fabulous murmur of woods filled the air.

Up in their rose-garden, on the valley's side facing the sun, the gardener and his wife lived contentedly sharing toil and ease. They had been young, they were not yet old ; and though they had to be frugal they did not call themselves poor. A strange fortune had belonged always to the plot of ground over which they laboured ; whether because the soil was so rich, or the place so sheltered from cold, or the gardener so skilled in the craft, which had come down

in his family from father to son, could not be known ; but certainly it was true that his rose-trees gave forth better bloom and bore earlier and later through the season than any others that were to be found in those parts.

The good couple accepted what came to them, simply and gladly, thanking God. Perhaps it was from the kindness of fortune, or perhaps because the sweet perfume of the roses had mixed itself in their blood, that her man and his wife were so sweet-tempered and gentle in their ways. The colour of the roses was in their faces, and the colour of the rose was in their hearts ; to her man she was the most beautiful and dearest of sweethearts, to his wife he was the best and kindest of lovers.

Every morning, before it was light, her man and his wife would go into the garden and gather all the roses that were ripe for sale ; then with full baskets on their backs they would set out, and get to the market just as the level sunbeams from the east were striking all the vanes and spires of the city into gold. There they would dispose of their flowers to the florists and salesmen of the town, and after that trudge home

again to hoe, and dig, and weed, and water, and prune, and plant for the rest of the day. No man ever saw them the one without the other, and the thought that such a thing might some day happen was the only fear and sorrow of their lives.

That they had no children of their own was scarcely a sorrow to them. "It seems to me," said her man after they had been married for some years, "that God means that our roses are to be our children since He has made us love them so much. They will last when we are grown grey, and will support and comfort us in our old age."

All the roses they had were red, and varied little in kind, yet her man and his wife had a name for each of them ; to every tree they had given a name, until it almost seemed that the trees knew, and tried to answer when they heard the voices which spoke to them.

"Jane Janet, and you ought to blossom more freely at your age !" his wife might say to one some evening as she went round and watered the flowers ; and the next day, when the two came to their dark morning's gathering, Jane Janet would show ten or twelve great blooms under the light of the

lantern, every one of them the birth of a single night.

“Mary Maudlin,” the gardener would say, as he washed the blight off a favourite rose, “to be sure, you are very beautiful, but did I not love you so, you were more trouble than all your sisters put together.” And then all at once great dew-drops would come tumbling down out of Mary Maudlin’s eyes at the tender words of his reproach. So day by day the companionable feet of the happy couple moved to and fro, always intent on the tender nurturing of their children.

In their garden they had bees too, who drew all their honey from the roses, and lived in a cone-thatched hive close under the porch ; and that honey was famous through all the country-side, for its flavour was like no other honey made in the world.

Sometimes his wife said to her man, “I think our garden is looked after for us by some good Spirit ; perhaps it is the Saints after whom we have named our rose-children.”

Her man made answer, “It is rich in years, which, like an old wine, have made it gain in flavour ; it has been with us from

father to son for three hundred years, and that is a great while."

"A full fairy's lifetime!" said his wife. "'Tis a pity we shall not hand it on, being childless."

"When we two die," said her man, "the roses will make us a grave and watch over us." As he spoke a whole shower of petals fell from the trees.

"Did no one pass, just then?" said his wife.

Now one morning, soon after this, in the late season of roses, her man had gone before his wife into the garden, gathering for the market in the grey dusk before dawn; and wherever he went moths and beetles came flocking to the light of his lantern, beating against its horn shutters and crying to get in. Out of each rose, as the light fell on it, winged things sprang up into the darkness; but all the roses were bowed and heavy as if with grief. As he picked them from the stem great showers of dew fell out of them, making pools in the hollow of his palm.

There was such a sound of tears that he stopped to listen, and, surely, from all round the garden came the "drip, drip" of

falling dew. Yet the pathways under foot were all dry : there had been no rain and but little dew. Whence was it, then, that the roses so shook and sobbed ? For under the stems, surely, there was something that sobbed ; and suddenly the light of the lantern took hold of a beautiful small figure, about three feet high, dressed in old rose and green, that went languidly from flower to flower. She lifted up such tired hands to draw their heads down to hers ; and to each one she kissed she made a weary little sound of farewell, her beautiful face broken up with grief ; and now and then out of her lips ran soft chuckling laughter, as if she still meant to be glad, but could not.

The gardener broke into tears to behold a sight so pitiful ; and his wife had stolen out silently to his side, and was weeping too.

“Drip, drip” went the roses : wherever she came and kissed, they all began weeping. The gardener and his wife knelt down and watched her ; in and out, in and out, not a rose-blossom did she miss. She came nearer and nearer, and at last was standing before them. She seemed hardly able to draw limb after limb, so

weak was she ; and her filmy garments hung heavy as chains.

A little voice said in their ears, " Kiss me, I am dying ! "

They tasted her breath of rose.

" Do not die ! " they said simply.

" I have lived three hundred years," she answered. " Now I must die. I am the Luck of the Roses, but I must leave them and die."

" When must you die ? " said her man and his wife.

The little lady said : " Before the last roses are over ; the chills of night take me, the first frost will kill me. Soon I must die. Now I must dwindle and dwindle, for little life is left to me, and only so can I keep warm. As life and heat grow less, so must I, till presently I am no more."

She was a little thing already—not old, she did not seem old, but delicate as a snow-flake, and so weary. She laid her head in the hand of the gardener's wife and sobbed hard.

" You dear people, who belong so much to me too, I have watched over you."

" Let us watch over you ! " said they. They lifted her like a feather-weight, and

carried her into the house. There, in the ingle-nook, she sat and shivered, while they brought rose-leaves and piled round her ; but every hour she grew less and less.

Presently the sun shone full upon her from the doorway : its light went through her as through coloured glass ; and her man and his wife saw, over the ingle behind her, shadows fluttering as of falling rose-petals : it was the dying rose of her life, falling without end.

All day long she dwindled and grew more weak and frail. Before sunset she was smaller than a small child when it first comes into the world. They set honey before her to taste, but she was too weary to uncurl her tiny hands : they lay like two white petals in the green lap of her dress. The half-filled panniers of roses stood where they had been set down in the porch : the good couple had taken nothing to the market that day. The luck of the house lay dying, for all their care ; they could but sit and watch.

When the sun had set, she faded away fast : now she was as small as a young wren. The gardener's wife took her and held her for warmth in the hollow of her

hand. Presently she seemed no more than a grasshopper : the tiny chirrup of her voice was heard, about the middle of the night, asking them to take her and lay her among the roses, in the heart of one of the red roses, that there at last she might die and pass into nothing.

They went together into the dark night, and felt their way among the roses ; presently they quite lost her tiny form : she had slipped away into the heart of a Jane Janet rose.

The gardener and his wife went back into the house and sat waiting ; they did not know for what, but they were too sad at heart to think just then of sleep.

Soon the first greys of morning began to steal over the world ; pale shivers ran across the sky, and one bird chirped in its sleep among the trees.

All at once there rang a soft sound of lamentation among the roses in the rose-garden ; again and again, like the cry of many gentle wounded things in pain. The gardener and his wife went and opened the door : they had to tell the bees of the fairy's death. They looked out under the twilight, into the garden they loved.

“Drip,” “drip,” “drip” came the sound of steady weeping under the leaves. Peering out through the shadows they saw all the rose-trees rocking themselves softly for grief.

“Snow?” said his wife to her man.

But it was not snow.

Under the dawn all the roses in the garden had turned white ; for they knew that the fairy was dead.

The gardener and his wife woke the bees, and told them of the fairy’s death ; then they looked in each other’s faces, and saw that they, too, had become white and grey.


With gentle eyes the old couple took hands, and went down into the garden to gather white roses for the market.

THE WHITE KING

TO
KATE



THE WHITE KING

ONG years ago there was living a Queen who could not keep count of the countries over which she ruled. Her wealth and her wonderful beauty made her an apple of discord to all the kings who lived round about her borders. For love of her they waged perpetual war upon one another, and every king who proved victorious made a gift to the Queen of the country of the one whom he had conquered, in the hopes of thereby strengthening his claim to her favour. Thus it came about that she could no longer keep count of the lands which had fallen under her rule; yet still of all her suitors she chose none.

Now at this time there was one King, and only one, who had not succeeded in losing his heart to the Queen's majesty, in

spite of her wealth and power, and all her wonderful beauty. And so, during a long time, since his fancy was thus free, he was left in undisturbed peace and prosperity, while other kings fought out their jealous battles, and stole away each other's lands. And because his reign was so quiet and his country in such rest, his people, for a pet-name and for their pride in him, named him "the White King."

Now after a time the Queen took it as an insult that any one should be so indifferent to the power of her charms, and she began to threaten him with war for this reason and for that, wishing thereby to cajole him into becoming her suitor. But the White King saw through all the disguises with which she covered her meaning, and understood the arrogance of her claim; so one day he sent to her as a gift a statue of himself with his sword sheathed, and all his armour covered over with the cloak of peace. Round the base of it was written

"When a heart in stone doth move,
Then your lover I may prove;
But until the marvel's done,
Fruitlessly your wars are won."

The Queen looked once at the statue,

and for a long time after never looked away ; and when at last she did her heart had been taken captive. Then she looked at the words beneath, and the red flush that rose to her face was not gone when the last of her army passed out of the city gates to carry war into the country of the man who had dared thus to speak scorn of her.

For a whole year the White King fought with the forces she sent against him ; but when all the other kings came to her aid, then, stronghold by stronghold, all his cities were taken, and his lands were laid waste and their villages burnt, and nothing but defeat and ruin remained.

Yet in the last battle, when his enemies thought to have him a safe prisoner, all of a sudden they found that the White King had disappeared.

Back came the Queen's armies in triumph with their allies, and the conquered territory was added as one more to the many that formed her realm. But the Queen sighed as she looked at the White King's statue, and her triumph grew bitter to her. Day by day, as she looked at the calm marble face, her love for it increased, and she

owned sadly to herself, "He whom I have conquered has conquered me!"

Of the lost King himself no tidings could be learned, though search was made far and wide. Minstrels came to the court, and sang of his great deeds in fighting against odds, but of his end they sang variously. Some sang that he lay buried beneath the thickest of the slain; others that from his last battle he had been carried by good fairies, and that after he had been healed of his wounds, he would return in a hundred years and recover his kingdom.

One minstrel came to stay at the court, who sang of ruined homes and wasted fields, and a happy land laid desolate, and how its King wandered friendless and unknown through the world, hiding himself in disguise, sometimes in the cottages of the poor, and sometimes in the dwellings of the rich. But from no one could the Queen learn any news that satisfied her, or gave hope that he would at last bend down his pride, and come and sue to her for forgiveness.

Wishing to have a hiding place for her grief, she caused the statue to be set up in a green glade in the most lonely part of the

gardens ; and there often she would go and gaze on the calm noble face (whose closed eyes seemed even now to disdain her love), and would wonder how long a queen's heart took to break.

But after a time she thought, "Though I may never win the love of the White King for my own, is there no way by which my passion can assuage itself, when by lifting my finger I can summon half fairyland to my aid ?

So she called to her the most powerful Fairy she knew, and taking her into the green glade, began sighing and weeping in front of the White King's statue. "This," she said, "is the image of the only man on earth I can love ! But the man himself is lost, gone I know not where ; and my heart is breaking for grief ! Give this statue a life and a heart, and teach it to love me, else soon I shall surely be dead !"

The Fairy said to her, "All the might of fairyland could not do so much ; but a little of it I can do ; and if Fate is kind to you, Fate may bring the rest of it to pass."

"How much can you do ?" asked the Queen.

"This only," said the Fairy, "but even

that you must do for yourself: I can but show you the way. Stone is stone, and out of stone I cannot make a heart; but a heart may grow into it, and this is the way to compass it.

“You must find first a man who is loved, but does not love (for if he loves, the statue’s heart when it wakes will turn from you); and him you must kill with your own hand, and take out his heart and bury it beneath the feet of the statue. Then I will work my charms, and gradually, as a flower draws its life out of the ground, so the statue will draw life out of the human heart buried below. And after a little time you will see it move, and in a little time more its senses will come, and it will be able to hear, and see, and speak. But full life will not come to it until it has learned to love. Then, so soon as it learns to love, it will become no longer stone, but a human being.”

But the Queen said, “Supposing its love were to turn from me to another, where should I be then?”

“Surely,” said the Fairy, “the secret will be your own, and the watching of its life as it grows will be yours. Your voice it

will hear, your face it will see ; whom, then, will it learn to love more than you ? ”

“ Wait, then, till I have found the man,” said the Queen, “ and we will do this thing between us ! ”

She searched long among her court for some man whose heart was whole, but who was himself loved. Generally, however, she found it was all the other way. There was not a man at the court who was not in love, or did not think himself so ; and if there were one who had no thought of love, he was too poor and mean for the love of any woman to be his.

But one day the Queen heard a minstrel in the palace courtyard singing and making merry against love. It was that same minstrel who sang only sad songs of the White King’s lands laid waste and himself a wanderer : a fellow with a dark sunburnt face, and thick hair hanging over his eyes. And as he sang and rattled his jests at the courtiers who stood by to listen, the Queen noticed one of her waiting-women looking out of a small lattice, who, as she watched the singer’s face, and listened to his words, had tears running fast down out of her eyes.

“Is this a case,” thought the Queen, “of a man who is loved but who does not love?”

She sent for the minstrel, and said to him, when he stood bending his head before her, “Is this pretty scorn that you cast on love earnest or jest?”

“Nay,” he answered, “I jest in good earnest; for to speak of love in earnest is to jest about it.”

“So,” said the Queen, “you are heart-whole?”

“Why,” said the minstrel, “I doubt if a mouse could find its way in; and if I am heart-whole in your presence, I ought to be safe from all the world!”

“Now,” thought the Queen, “if only my waiting-woman answers the test, here is the heart I will have out!”

Then she bade the minstrel follow her to where stood the White King’s statue, bidding him sit down under it and sing her more of his rhymes about love.

So the minstrel crossed his legs in the long grass and sang. His song became bitter to the Queen’s ears, for he took the words that were round the statue, and rhymed them and chimed them, and threw them laughing in the Queen’s face. She

hated him so that she could have poisoned him ; but she remembered that his life was necessary for her experiment to reach its end. So she sent instead for a sleepy wine, which she gave him to drink, and presently his voice grew thick and his head dropped down upon his breast, and his legs slid out and brought him down level with the grass. When night came on she left him soundly sleeping with his head between the feet of the White King's statue.

Then she sent for the waiting-woman and said, "Go down to the White King's statue, and find for me my handkerchief which I have dropped there." But as the girl went, the Queen stole secretly after her, and watched her come to where the minstrel lay asleep.

And when the waiting-maid saw him lying so, with his face thrown back, she knelt down in the grass by his side, and putting her arms softly about him, kissed him upon the lips over and over again as though she could never come to an end, and her tears dropped down on to his face, and, as if her mind were gone mad for love of him, the Queen heard her sighing, "Oh, White King, my White King, my

Beloved, whom I love, but who loves me not !”

As soon as the waiting-maid was gone, the Queen came softly to the place, and with a sharp knife she cut out the minstrel's heart and buried it at the base of the statue.

In the morning the minstrel was found lying dead, with his heart gone ; and when they washed the dead face and put back the hair that covered the eyes, they found that it was the White King himself.

That day, and for many days after, there were two women weeping in the palace : one was the Queen and the other was the waiting-woman. But the body of the White King they buried close by the statue in the green glade.

Now presently, when the first violence of her grief was over, the Queen came to look at the place ; and, sure enough, the Fairy had been there with her spells. When the wind blew the statue swayed gently like a tree in the wind.

The Queen caused gates and barriers to be put up so that no one should enter the glade but herself ; only Love found a way, and at night, when all the world was asleep, the waiting-woman crept through a loose

pale in the barriers, and came to moan over the place where her lover had been slain.

All night she would lie with her arms round the feet of the White King's statue, and dream of the dead minstrel whom she had loved and known through all his disguise. And all night long her lips would murmur his name, and whisper over and over again the sad story of her love.

And presently, as the statue drew life from the heart buried beneath its feet, its ears were opened and it heard.

In the daytime the Queen would come and sit before it and whisper to it of love, offering it all the gifts of riches and power that are in the hands of kings to give ; but at night came the waiting-woman and offered it only love.

Out of the ground the Queen saw grow a small plant, that began to creep upwards and to wind itself round the base of the statue ; and when she saw that its flower was the deadly nightshade, her heart trembled and her conscience made her afraid.

But the waiting-maid, when she saw it, picked the sad blossoms and made a crown for the statue's head as of pale amethyst and gold : for she said to herself, " Down

below my dear lies dead, and the roots of this flower are in his hair."

One day as the Queen came into the glade, she heard the dead minstrel's voice, and her heart shook with terror as she saw the statue open its white lips and sing, and recognised the tune and the words as those which had made her heart feel so bitter against him ; for she thought, "What if he knows that it is I who have slain him?"

Now that she saw that the stone had its five senses, and could see and speak and hear, she pleaded to it all day out of the greatness of her grief and her love. But the statue never returned her word.

At night, lying with her face bowed between the White King's statue's feet, the waiting-woman knew nothing of all this change ; only the statue heard and saw and knew. And at last one day as her tears dropped on them, she felt the feet grow warm between her hands ; and a voice over her head that she remembered and loved, said, "Little heart, why are you weeping so?"

In the morning the Queen came and found the statue gone. There on the pedestal was only the print of his feet, half

covered by the deadly nightshade which had climbed up to his knees and fallen. There it lay heavy and half-withered, clasping the hollows where his feet had been.

The Queen knelt down and caught the bare stone pedestal in her arms. "Oh, Love," she cried, "have you left me? Oh, White King, my White King, have you betrayed me?" And as she clung there weeping, her lips touched the deadly nightshade; and the nightshade thrilled, and felt joy give new life down into its roots.

It reached up and laid its arms about the Queen, about her throat, and about her feet and about her waist. "Dearly, dearly we love each other," said the nightshade, "do we not?"

At night the courtiers came, and found only a dead Queen lying, and the statue gone.

But the White King had gone home to his own land to marry the waiting-woman.

THE STORY OF THE HERONS

TO

AUDREY AND VERONICA



THE STORY OF THE HERONS



LONG time ago there lived a King and a Queen who loved each other dearly. They had both fallen in love at first sight ; and as their love began so it went on through all their life. Yet this, which was the cause of all their happiness, was the cause also of all their misfortunes.

In his youth, when he was a beautiful young bachelor, the King had had the ill-luck to attract the heart of a jealous and powerful Fairy ; and though he never gave her the least hope or encouragement, when she heard that his love had been won at first sight by a mere mortal, her rage and resentment knew no bounds. She said nothing, however, but bided her time.

After they had been married a year the Queen presented her husband with a little

daughter ; before she was yet a day old she was the most beautiful object in the world, and life seemed to promise her nothing but fortune and happiness.

The family Fairy came to the blessing of the new-born ; and she, looking at it as it lay beautifully asleep in its cradle, and seeing that it had already as much beauty and health as the heart could desire, promised it love as the next best gift it was within her power to offer. The Queen, who knew how much happiness her own love had brought her, was kissing the good Fairy with all the warmth of gratitude, when a black kite came and perched upon the window-sill crying : “ And I will give her love at first sight ! The first living thing that she sets eyes on she shall love to distraction, whether it be man or monster, prince or pauper, bird, beast or reptile.” And as the wicked Fairy spoke she clapped her wings, and up through the boards of the floor, and out from under the bed, and in through the window, came a crowd of all the ugliest shapes in the world. Thick and fast they came, gathering about the cradle and lifting their heads over the edge of it, waiting for the poor little Princess to wake

up and fall in love at first sight with one of them.

Luckily the child was asleep ; and the good Fairy, after driving away the black kite and the crowd of beasts it had called to its aid, wrapped the Princess up in a shawl and carried her away to a dark room where no glimmer of light could get in.

She said to the Queen : "Till I can devise a better way, you must keep her in the dark ; and when you take her into the open air you must blindfold her eyes. Some day, when she is of a fit age, I will bring a handsome Prince for her ; and only to him shall you unblindfold her at last, and make love safe for her."

She went, leaving the King and Queen deeply stricken with grief over the harm which had befallen their daughter. They did not dare to present even themselves before her eyes lest love for them, fatal and consuming, should drive her to distraction. In utter darkness the Queen would sit and cherish her daughter, clasping her to her breast, and calling her by all sweet names ; but the little face, except by stealth when it was sound asleep, she never dared to see,

nor did the baby-Princess know the face of the mother who loved her.

By and by, however, the family Fairy came again, saying : " Now, I have a plan by which your child may enjoy the delights of seeing, and no ill come of it." And she caused to be made a large chamber, the whole of one side of which was a mirror. High up in the opposite wall were windows so screened that from below no one could look out of them, but across on to the mirror came all the sweet sights of the world, glimpses of wood and field, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and of every bird as it flew by. So the little Princess was brought and set in a screened place looking towards the mirror, and there her eyes learned gradually all the beautiful things of the world. Over the screen, in the glass before her, she learned to know her mother's face, and to love it dearly in a gentle child-like fashion ; and when she could talk she became very wise, understanding all that was told her about the danger of looking at anything alive, except by its reflection in the glass.

When she went out into the open air for her health, she always wore a bandage over

her eyes, lest she should look, and love something too well : but in the chamber of the mirror her eyes were free to see whatever they could. The good Fairy, making herself invisible, came and taught her to read and make music, and draw ; so that before she was fifteen she was the most charming and accomplished, as well as the most beautiful Princess of her day.

At last the Fairy said that the time was come for her world of reflections to be made real, and she went away to fetch the ideal Prince that the Princess might at first sight fall in love with him.

The very day after she was gone, as the morning was fine, the Princess went out with one of her maids for a walk through the woods. Over her patient eyes she wore a bandage of green silk, through which she felt the sunlight fall pleasantly.

Out of doors the Princess knew most things by their sounds. She passed under rustling leaves, and along by the side of running water ; and at last she heard the silence of the water, and knew that she was standing by the great fish-pond in the middle of the wood. Then she said to her waiting-woman, "Is there not some great

bird fishing out there, for I hear the dipping of his bill, and the water falling off it as he draws out the fish?"

And just as she was saying that, the wicked Fairy, who had long bided her time, coming softly up from behind, pushed the waiting-woman off the bank into the deep water of the pond. Then she snatched away the silk bandage, and before the Princess had time to think or close her eyes, she had lost her heart to a great heron, that was standing half-way up to his feathers fishing among the reeds.

The Princess, with her eyes set free, laughed for joy at the sight of him. She stretched out her arms from the bank and cried most musically for the bird to come to her; and he came in grave stately fashion, with trailing legs, and slow sobbing creak of his wings, and settled down on the bank beside her. She drew his slender neck against her white throat, and laughed and cried with her arms round him, loving him so that she forgot all in the world beside. And the heron looked gravely at her with kind eyes, and, bird-like, gave her all the love he could, but not more; and so, presently, casting his grey wings abroad,

lifted himself and sailed slowly back to his fishing among the reeds.

The waiting-woman had got herself out of the water, and stood wringing her clothes and her hands beside the Princess. "O, sweet mistress," she cried, with lamentation, "now is all the evil come about which it was our whole aim to avoid ! And what, and what will the Queen your mother say ?"

But the Princess answered, smiling, "Foolish girl, I had no thought of what happiness meant till now ! See you where my love is gone ? and did you notice the bend of his neck, and the exceeding length of his legs, and the stretch of his grey wings as he flew ? This pond is his hall of mirrors, wherein he sees the reflection of all his world. Surely I, from my hall of mirrors, am the true mate for him !"

Her maid, seeing how far the evil had gone, and that no worse could now happen, ran back to the palace and curdled all the court's blood with her news. The King and the Queen and all their nobility rushed down, and there they found the Princess with the heron once more in her arms, kissing and fondling it with all the marks

of a sweet and maidenly passion. "Dear mother," she said, as soon as she saw the Queen, "the happiness, which you feared would be sorrow, has come ; and it is such happiness I have no name for it ! And the evil that you so dreaded, see how sweet it is ! And how sweet it is to see all the world with my own eyes and you also at last !" And for the first time in her life she kissed her mother's face in the full light of day.

But her mother hung sobbing upon her neck, "O, my darling, my beautiful," she wept, "does your heart belong for ever to this grey bird ?"

Her daughter answered, "He is more than all the world to me ! Is he not goodly to look upon ? Have you considered the bend of his neck, the length of his legs, and the waving of his wings ; his skill also when he fishes : what imagination, what presence of mind !"

"Alas, alas," sorrowed the Queen, "dear daughter, is this all true to you ?"

"Mother," cried the Princess, clinging to her with entreaty, "is all the world blind but me ?"

The heron had become quite fond of the

Princess ; wherever she went it followed her, and, indeed, without it nowhere would she go. Whenever it was near her, the Princess laughed and sang, and when it was out of her sight she became sad as night. All the courtiers wept to see her in such bondage. " Ah," said she, " your eyes have been worn out with looking at things so long ; mine have been kept for me in a mirror."

When the good family Fairy came (for she was at once sent for by the Queen, and told of all that had happened), she said, " Dear Madam, there are but two things you can do : either you can wring the heron's neck, and leave the Princess to die of grief ; or you can make the Princess happy in her own way, by——" Her voice dropped, and she looked from the King to the Queen before she went on. " At her birth I gave your daughter love for my gift ; now it is her's, will you let her keep it ? "

The King and the Queen looked softly at each other. " Do not take love from her," said they, " let her keep it ! "

" There is but one way," answered the Fairy.

“Do not tell me the way,” said the Queen weeping, “only let the way be !”

So they went with the Fairy down to the great pond, and there sat the Princess, with the grey heron against her heart. She smiled as she saw them come. “I see good in your hearts toward me !” she cried. “Dear godmother, give me the thing that I want, that my love may be happy !”

Then the Fairy stroked her but once with her wand, and two grey herons suddenly rose up from the bank, and sailed away to a hiding-place in the reeds.

The Fairy said to the Queen, “You have made your daughter happy ; and still she will have her voice and her human heart, and will remember you with love and gratitude ; but her greatest love will be to the grey heron, and her home among the reeds.”

So the changed life of the Princess began ; every day her mother went down to the pool and called, and the Princess came rising up out of the reeds, and folded her grey wings over her mother’s heart. Every day her mother said, “Daughter of mine, are you happy ?”

And the Princess answered her, “Yes, for I love and am loved.”

Yet each time the mother heard more and more of a note of sadness come into her daughter's voice ; and at last one day she said, " Answer me truly, as the mother who brought you into the world, whether you be happy in your heart of hearts or no?"

Then the heron-Princess laid her head on the Queen's heart, and said, " Mother, my heart is breaking with love ! "

" For whom, then ? " asked the Queen astonished.

" For my grey heron, whom I love, and who loves me so much. And yet it is love that divides us, for I am still troubled with a human heart, and often it aches with sorrow because all the love in it can never be fully understood or shared by my heron ; and I have my human voice left, and that gives me a hundred things to say all day, for which there is no word in herons' language, and so he cannot understand them. Therefore these things only make a gulf between him and me. For all the other grey herons in the pools there is happiness, but not for me who have too big a heart between my wings."

Her mother said softly, " Wait, wait, little heron-daughter, and it shall be well

with you ! ” Then she went to the Fairy and said, “ My daughter’s heart is lonely among the reeds, for the grey heron’s love covers but half of it. Give her some companions of her own kind that her hours may become merry again ! ”

So the Fairy took and turned five of the Princess’s lady’s-maids into herons, and sent them down to the pool.

The five herons stood each on one leg in the shallows of the pool, and cried all day long ; and their tears fell down into the water and frightened away the fish that came their way. For they had human hearts that cried out to be let go. “ O, cruel, cruel,” they wept, whenever the heron-Princess approached, “ see what we suffer because of you, and what they have made of us for your sake ! ”

The Princess came to her mother and said, “ Dear mother, take them away, for their cry wearies me, and the pool is bitter with their tears ! They only awake the human part of my heart that wants to sleep ; presently, may be, if it is let alone, it will forget itself.”

Her mother said, “ It is my coming every day also that keeps it awake.” The

Princess answered, "This sorrow belongs to my birthright; you must still come; but for the others, let the Fairy take them away."

So the Fairy came and released the five lady's-maids whom she had changed into herons. And they came up out of the water, stripping themselves of their grey feather-skins and throwing them back into the pool. The Fairy said, "You foolish maids, you have thrown away a gift that you should have valued; these skins you could have kept and held as heirlooms in your family."

The five maids answered, "We want to forget that there are such things as herons in the world!"

After much thought the Queen said to the Fairy, "You have changed a Princess into a heron, and five maids into herons and back again; cannot you change one heron into a Prince?" But the Fairy answered sadly, "Our power has limits; we can bring down, but we cannot bring up, if there be no heart to answer our call. The five maids only followed their hearts, that were human, when I called them back; but a heron has only a heron's heart, and unless his heart become too great for a bird and

he earn a human one, I cannot change him to a higher form." "How can he earn a human one?" asked the Queen. "Only if he love the Princess so well that his love for her becomes stronger than his life," answered the Fairy. "Then he will have earned a human body, and then I can give him the form that his heart suits best. There may be a chance, if we wait for it and are patient, for the Princess's love is great and may work miracles.

A little while after this, the Queen watching, saw that the two herons were making a nest among the reeds. "What have you there?" said the mother to her daughter. "A little hollow place," answered the heron-Princess, "and in it the moon lies." A little while after she said again, "What have you there, now, little daughter?" And her daughter answered, "Only a small hollow space; but in it two moons lie."

The Queen told the family Fairy how in a hollow of the reeds lay two moons. "Now, said the Fairy," we will wait no longer. If your daughter's love has touched the heron's heart and made it grow larger than a bird's, I can help them both to hap-

piness ; but if not, then birds they must still remain."

Among the reeds the heron said in bird language to his wife, "Go and stretch your wings for a little while over the water ; it is weary work to wait here so long in the reeds." The heron-Princess looked at him with her bird's eyes, and all the human love in her heart strove, like a fountain that could not get free, to make itself known through them ; also her tongue was full of the longing to utter sweet words, but she kept them back, knowing they were beyond the heron's power to understand. So she answered merely in heron's language, "Come with me, and I will come !"

They rose, wing beating beside wing ; and the reflection of their grey breasts slid out under them over the mirror of the pool.

Higher they went and higher, passing over the tree tops, and keeping time together as they flew. All at once the wings of the grey heron flagged, then took a deep beat ; he cried to the heron-Princess, "Turn, and come home, yonder there is danger flying to meet us !" Before them hung a brown blot in the air, that winged and grew large. The two herons turned and flew

back. "Rise," cried the grey heron, "we must rise!" and the Princess knew what was behind, and struggled with the whole strength of her wings for escape.

The grey heron was bearing ahead on stronger wing. "With me, with me!" he cried. "If it gets above us, one of us is dead!" But the falcon had fixed his eye on the Princess for his quarry, and flew she fast, or flew she slow, there was little chance for her now. Up and up she strained, but still she was behind her mate, and still the falcon gained.

The heron swung back to her side; she saw the anguish and fear of his downward glance as his head ranged by hers. Past her the falcon went, towering for the final swoop.

The Princess cried in heron's language, "Farewell, dear mate, and farewell, two little moons among the reeds!" But the grey heron only kept closer to her side.

Overhead the falcon closed in its wings and fell like a dead weight out of the clouds. "Drop!" cried the grey heron to his mate.

At his word she dropped; but he stayed, stretching up his wings, and, passing between the descending falcon and its prey, caught

in his own body the death-blow from its beak. Drops of his blood fell upon the heron-Princess.

He stricken in body, she in soul, together they fell down to the margin of the pool. The falcon still clung fleshing its beak in the neck of its prey. The heron-Princess threw back her head, and, darting furiously, struck her own sharp bill deep into the falcon's breast. The bird threw out its wings with a hoarse cry and fell back dead, with a little tuft of the grey heron's feathers still upon its beak.

The heron-Princess crouched down, and covered with her wings the dying form of her mate ; in her sorrow she spoke to him in her own tongue, forgetting her bird's language. The grey heron lifted his head, and, gazing tenderly, answered her with a human voice :

"Dear wife," he said, "at last I have the happiness so long denied to me of giving utterance in the speech that is your own to the love that you have put into my heart. Often I have heard you speak and have not understood ; now something has touched my heart, and changed it, so that I can both speak and understand."

“O, beloved !” She laid her head down by his. “The ends of the world belong to us now. Lie down, and die gently by my side, and I will die with you, breaking my heart with happiness.”

“No,” said the grey heron, “do not die yet ! Remember the two little moons that lie in the hollow among the reeds.” Then he laid his head down by hers, being too weak to say more.

They folded their wings over each other, and closed their eyes ; nor did they know that the Fairy was standing by them, till she stroked them both softly with her wand, saying to each of them the same words :

“Human heart, and human form, come out of the grey heron !”

And out of the grey heron-skins came two human forms ; the one was the Princess restored again to her own shape, but the other was a beautiful youth, with a bird-like look about the eyes, and long slender limbs. The Princess, as she gazed on him, found hardly any change, for love remained the same, binding him close to her heart ; and, grey heron or beautiful youth, he was all one to her now.

“Then came the Queen, weeping for

joy, and embracing them both, and after them, the Fairy. "O, how good an ending," she cried, "has come to that terrible dream ! Let it never be remembered or mentioned between us more !" And she began to lead the way back to the palace.

But the youth, to whom the Fairy gave the name of Prince Heron, turned and took up the two heron-skins which he and his wife had let fall, and followed, carrying them upon his arm. And as they came past the bed of reeds, the Princess went aside, and, stooping down in a certain place drew out from thence something which she came carrying, softly wrapped in the folds of her gown.

With what rejoicing the Princess and her husband were welcomed by the King and all the Court needs not to be told. For a whole month the festivities continued ; and whenever she showed herself, there was the Princess sitting with two eggs in her lap, and her hands over them to keep them warm. The King was impatient. "Why cannot you send them down to the poultry yard to be hatched ?" he said.

But the Princess replied smiling, "My

moons are my own, and I will keep them to myself."

"Do you hear?" she said one day, at last; and everybody who listened could hear something going "tap, tap," inside the shells. Presently the eggs cracked, and out of each, at the same moment, came a little grey heron.

When she saw that they were herons, the Queen wrung her hands. "O, Fairy," she cried, "what a disappointment is this! I had hoped two beautiful babies would have come out of those shells."

But the Fairy said, "It is no matter. Half of their hearts are human already; birds' hearts do not beat so. If you wish it, I can change them." So she stroked them softly with her wand, saying to each, "Human heart, and human form, come out of the grey heron!"

Yet she had to stroke them three times before they would turn; and she said to the Princess, "My dear, you were too satisfied with your lot when you laid these eggs. I doubt if more than a quarter of them is human."

"I was very satisfied," said the Princess, and she laughed across to her husband.

At last, however, on the third stroke of the wand, the heron's skins dropped off, and they changed into a pair of very small babies, a boy and a girl. But the difference between them and other children was, that instead of hair, their heads were covered with a fluff of downy grey feathers; also they had queer, round, bird-like eyes, and were able to sleep standing.

Now, after this the happiness of the Princess was great; but the Fairy said to her, "Do not let your husband see the heron-skins again for some while, lest with the memory a longing for his old life should return to him and take him away from you. Only by exchange with another can he ever get back his human form again, if he surrenders it of his own free will. And who is there so poor that he would willingly give up his human form to become a bird?"

So the Princess took the four coats of feather—her own and her husband's and her two children's—and hid them away in a closet of which she alone kept the key. It was a little gold key, and to make it safe she hung it about her neck, and wore it night and day.

The Prince said to her, "What is that little key that you wear always hung round your neck?"

She answered him, "It is the key to your happiness and mine. Do not ask more than that!" At that there was a look in his face that made her say, "You *are* happy, are you not?"

He kissed her, saying, "Happy indeed! Have I not you to make me so?" Yet though, indeed, he told no untruth, and was happy whenever she was with him, there were times when a restlessness and a longing for wings took hold of him; for, as yet, the life of a man was new and half strange to him, and a taint of his old life still mixed itself with his blood. But to her he was ashamed to say what might seem a complaint against his great fortune; so when she said "happiness," he thought, "Is it just the turning of that key that I want before my happiness can be perfect?"

Therefore, one night when the early season of spring made his longing strong in him, he took the key from the Princess while she slept, and opened the little closet in which hung the four feather coats. And when he saw his own, all at once he re-

membered the great pools of water, and how they lay in the shine and shadow of the moonlight, while the fish rose in rings upon their surface. And at that so great a longing came into him to revisit his old haunts that he reached out his hand and took down the heron-skin from its nail and put it over himself; so that immediately his old life took hold of him, and he flew out of the window in the form of a grey heron.

In the morning the Princess found the key gone from her neck, and her husband's place empty. She went in haste to the closet, and there stood the door wide with the key in it, and only three heron-skins hanging where four had used to be.

Then she came crying to the family Fairy, "My husband has taken his heron-skin and is gone! Tell me what I can do!"

The Fairy pitied her with all her heart, but could do nothing. "Only by exchange," said she, "can he get back his human shape; and who is there so poor that he would willingly lose his own form to become a bird? Only your children, who are but half human, can put their heron-skins on and off as they like and when they like."

In deep grief the Princess went to look for her husband down by the pools in the wood. But now his shame and sorrow at having deceived her were so great that as soon as he heard her voice he hid himself among the reeds, for he knew now that, having put on his heron-skin again, he could not take it off unless some one gave him a human form in exchange.

At last, however, so pitiful was the cry of the Princess for him, that he could bear to hear it no more ; but rising up from the reeds came trailing to her sadly over the water. "Ah, dear love !" she said when he was come to her, "if I had not distrusted you, you would not have deceived me : thus, for my fault we are punished." So she sorrowed, and he answered her :

"Nay, dear love, for if I had not deceived you, you would not have distrusted me. I thought I was not happy, yet I feared to tell it you." Thus they sorrowed together, both laying on themselves the blame and the burden.

Then she said to him : "Be here for me to-night, for now I must go ; but then I shall return."

She went back to the palace, and told

her mother of all that had happened. "And now," she said, "you who know where my happiness lies will not forbid me from following it; for my heart is again with the grey heron." And the Queen wept, but would not say her no.

So that night the Princess went and kissed her children as they slept standing up in their beds, with their funny feather-pates to one side; and then she took down her skin of feathers and put it on, and became changed once more into a grey heron. And again she went up to the two in their cots, and kissed their birdish heads saying: "They who can change at will, being but half human, they will come and visit us in the great pool by the wood, and bring back word of us here."

In the morning the Princess was gone, and the two children when they woke looked at each other and said: "Did we dream last night?"

They both answered each other "Yes, first we dreamed that our mother came and kissed us; and we liked that. And then we dreamed that a grey heron came and kissed us, and we liked that better still!" They waved their arms up and down.

“Why have we not wings?” they kept asking. All day long they did this, playing that they were birds. If a window were opened, it was with the greatest difficulty that they were kept from trying to fly through.

In the Court they were known as the “Feather-pates”; nothing could they be taught at all. When they were rebuked they would stand on one leg and sigh with their heads on one side; but no one ever saw tears come out of their birdish eyes.

Now at night they would dream that two grey herons came and stood by their bedsides, kissing them; “And where in the world,” they said when they woke, “*are* our wings?”

One day, wandering about in the palace, they came upon the closet in which hung the two little feather coats. “O!!!” they cried, and opened hard bright eyes at each other, nodding, for now they knew what they would do. “If we told, they would be taken off us,” they said; and they waited till it was night. Then they crept back and took the two little coats from their pegs, and, putting them on, were turned into two young herons.

Through the window they flew, away down to the great fish-pond in the wood. Their father and mother saw them coming, and clapped their wings for joy. "See," they said, "our children come to visit us, and our hearts are left to us to love with. What further happiness can we want?" But when they were not looking at each other they sighed.

All night long the two young herons stayed with their parents ; they bathed, and fished, and flew, till they were weary. Then the Princess showed them the nest among the reeds, and told them all the story of their lives.

"But it is much nicer to be herons than to be real people," said the young ones, sadly, and became very sorrowful when dawn drew on, and their mother told them to go back to the palace and hang up the feather coats again, and be as they had been the day before.

Long, long the day now seemed to them ; they hardly waited till it was night before they took down their feather-skins, and, putting them on, flew out and away to the fish-pond in the wood.

So every night they went, when all in the

palace were asleep ; and in the morning came back before anyone was astir, and were found by their nurses lying demurely between the sheets, just as they had been left the night before.

One day the Queen when she went to see her daughter said to her, "My child, your two children are growing less like human beings and more like birds every day. Nothing will they learn or do, but stand all day flapping their arms up and down, and saying, 'Where are our wings, where are our wings?' The idea of one of them ever coming to the throne makes your father's hair stand on end under his crown."

"Oh, mother," said the heron-Princess, "I have made a sad bed for you and my father to lie on !"

One day the two children said to each other, "Our father and mother are sad, because they want to be real persons again, instead of having wings and catching fish the way we like to do. Let us give up being real persons, which is all so much trouble, and such a want of exercise, and make them exchange with us !" But when the two young herons went down to the

pond and proposed it to them, their parents said, "You are young ; you do not know what you would be giving up." Nor would they consent to it at all.

Now one morning it happened that the Feather-pates were so late in returning to the palace that the Queen, coming into their chamber, found the two beds empty ; and just as she had turned away to search for them elsewhere, she heard a noise of wings and saw the two young herons come flying in through the window. Then she saw them take off their feather-skins and hang them up in the closet, and after that go and lie down in their beds so as to look as if they had been there all night.

The Queen struck her hands together with horror at the sight, but she crept away softly, so that they did not know they had been found out. But as soon as they were out of their beds and at play in another part of the palace, the Queen went to the closet, and setting fire to the two heron-skins where they hung, burnt them till not a feather of them was left, and only a heap of grey ashes remained to tell what had become of them.

At night, when the Feather-pates went to

their cupboards and found their skins gone, and saw what had become of them, their grief knew no bounds. They trembled with fear and rage, and tears rained out of their eyes as they beheld themselves deprived of their bird bodies and made into real persons for good and all.

“We won’t be real persons!” they cried. But for all their crying they knew no way out of it. They made themselves quite ill with grief; and that night, for the first time since they had found their way to the closet, they stayed where their nurses had put them, and did not even stand up in their beds to go to sleep. There they lay with gasping mouth, and big bird-like eyes all languid with grief, and hollow grey cheeks.

Presently their father and mother came seeking for them, wondering why they had not come down to the fish-pond as they were wont. “Where are you, my children?” cried the heron-Princess, putting her head in through the window.

“Here we are, both at death’s door!” they cried. “Come and see us die! Our wicked granddam has burnt our feather-skins and made us into real persons for

ever and ever, Amen. But we will die rather !”

The parent herons, when they heard that, flew in through the window and bent down over the little ones’ beds.

The two children reached up their arms. “Give us your feathers !” they cried. “We shall die if you don’t ! We *will* die if you don’t ! O, do !” But still the parent birds hesitated, nor knew what to do.

“Bend down, and let me whisper something !” said the boy to his father : and “Bend down, and whisper !” cried the girl to her mother. And father and mother bent down over the faces of their sick children. Then these, both together, caught hold of them, and crying, “Human heart, and human form, exchange with the grey heron !” pulled off their parents’ feather-skins, and put them upon themselves.

And there once more stood Prince Heron and the Princess in human shape, while the two children had turned into herons in their place.

The young herons laughed and shouted and clapped their wings for joy. “Are you not happy now ?” cried they. And when

their parents saw the joy, not only in their children's eyes, but in each other's, and felt their hearts growing glad in the bodies they had regained, then they owned that the Feather-pates had been wise in their generation, and done well according to their lights.

So it came about that the Prince and the Princess lived happily ever after, and the two young herons lived happily also, and were the best-hearted birds the world ever saw.

In course of time the Prince and Princess had other children, who pleased the old King better than the first had done. But the parents loved none better than the two who lived as herons by the great fish-pond in the wood; nor could there be greater love than was found between these and their younger brothers and sisters, whose nature it was to be real persons.

SYRINGA

10

DORA



SYRINGA



GREAT many years ago there lived a King who spent his days in travelling about to find the woman he could love and take to be his wife. Though the richest and most beautiful princesses offered him their hands in marriage, for none of them could he entertain the smallest affection. "It seems that I have had a dream," he said. "Somewhere my Love is, but I have not found her yet!"

In those days the country over which he was lord had two Kings, one reigned and the other ruled; and as long as this was so, since his brother-King who ruled was married, his counsellors allowed him who merely reigned to wander about at will in pursuit of his strange fancy.

When, however, the King who ruled died

without leaving an heir, then those same councillors said, "This will not do ; the State can wait no longer. Princes are born, and Kings die ; love or no love, for your people's sake you must marry !"

"Then why does he not marry me?" said the Queen-widow of the King that ruled.

The King that reigned said, "Rather than marry her I would marry my scullery-maid !" He became so terrified at the thought of her proposal that he took horse secretly by night, and rode away into the most secluded and uninhabited parts of his dominion.

Now here, as he rode along over many miles of barren moor and hill, one day, crossing a high ridge, he met the wind coming softly up out of the valley below him, and its breath upon his face was full of the perfume of some sweet flower. At that his heart, which had been so long listless and sad, seemed to awake within him. "Flower of my dream !" he cried ; and soon saw below him, nestling in a corner of the valley, a small garden half hidden in the embrace of tall girdling trees.

Down he went joyfully, following the fragrant call till he came to the entrance of the place ; and there, dismounting from his horse, he entered its green ways. A natural lawn mounted and hollowed before him in glossy sweeps, flowering shrubs dotted its heights, for the summer of the year was begun ; but the scent which had taken hold of his heart came from a great bush of white bloom in the centre of all.

Under the bush lay a young and beautiful girl, and the blossoms were sprinkling down, one by one, like dropped kisses upon her dear face. So soon as the King saw her he knew that his search was at an end, and that his dream of years had come true.

Their glad eyes met softly through the flowers ; and he said, "You had but to breathe for me, and I came !" For all her face and breath smelt to him of the blossoms she lay under.

She answered, "Three years I have lain with my ear upon the ground, and heard you going and coming, searching the world through ; and now at last you are come !" She rose up to the King's embrace, and they were to each other like old lovers long

parted and at last met, so long had they known of love in their dreams.

Twilight was beginning as they turned and went out of the garden. The King said, "What is your name all these years?"

And she answered him with a voice like a bird singing, "Syringa my name was, Syringa my name is, and will be while life lasts."

When they left the valley and went mounting the side of the hill, a sweet wind rose and rose, and came following them. All the way, as they rode, white blossoms came showering behind them, falling upon their faces and their hair, and whitening the track at their feet. Up to the city gates, where all the King's court and his councillors stood watching and waiting for his return, the blossoms kept following them, like little scented moths fluttering round them in the darkness.

When the gates were opened, the whole city became full of the scent of the bride's name.

So the marriage of the King who reigned was celebrated with all the joy and noise imaginable ; for all the people laughed and shouted and clapped their hands when their

eyes saw the beauty of the new Queen. But the dowager Queen, the widow of the King who ruled, put on yellow weeds, and shut herself up in a corner of the palace, eating unleavened bread and bitter herb sandwiches till all the rejoicings were over.

In a little while, however, she appeared to forget her grief, and, concealing her jealousy, made friends with the King who reigned, and with his Queen ; and the King was glad in his great happiness to think that no heart in all the kingdom remained under a cloud.

For nearly a year the happiness of the King and Queen lasted and grew perfect. Every day that they lived together they loved each other more and more. But the Queen-widow waited and watched till an opportunity for her evil working should come in.

Presently people who looked at Syringa's beauty began to say, "Is not such beauty more than human? Where does it come from, and what keeps it alive?" And though many in course of time learned to talk like this, no one ever seemed to know from whom such talk first came. Later, folk began to whisper instead of to talk.

"We have heard," they said, "one way by which such beauty can be kept alive, yet only one." Then others were heard saying, "Have you heard that this man's wife lost her child before it was a week old, and knows not where it can be gone; and that that man's wife lost hers in the same way a week before? And who will lose hers this week that's coming, if we don't know yet, we soon shall know!" And shortly, sure enough, all through the city there were mothers mourning for the loss of their children, who had gone, none knew where, before they were even a week old; and more and more the crowd was taught to say, "Look how beautiful the Queen grows!" whenever she walked or rode.

The Queen-widow listened to all this, and laughed. In her own chamber she had a cage filled with little blue birds, who cried lamentably all day long.

Now, just when all the city-talk and the dark looks of the people had grown to a head, Queen Syringa gave birth to a little son; and the King's joy was beyond all bounds. "Now," thought the Queen-widow, "now or never! Now I will ruin her or die!"

She watched her opportunity, till one day she found Syringa lying alone upon her couch with the child asleep between her arms.

The wicked Queen saw that Syringa also was asleep. She stooped down over the child, whispering a spell, and as she clapped her hands it started from between its mother's arms and flew away in the form of a little blue bird.

The Queen-widow did her best to catch the bird, but could not ; then she took blood, and, smearing the Queen's hands and face with it, left her lying there asleep.

So Syringa was found ; and the noise of it went through the city how she had killed her own child in order to keep alive her wondrous beauty. The King tried with heart and soul not to believe so wicked a story against the wife he loved, but the evidence was too strong. When asked, the Queen could explain nothing. "When I went to sleep," she said, "my child was in my arms, and when I awoke it was gone !"

Outside the palace all the people were crying for her to be put to death. "Give back to their mothers the babies that you have eaten !" they cried.

The King sent for his foster-brother, and told him to take the Queen away to some lonely and desolate place, and there to make an end of her. "She is too beautiful," he said, "and I loved her too much. Let her be very far away from me when she dies !"

So that night the King's foster-brother took the Queen, and set out in the direction of the waste places and the hills. All the day following they journeyed, till toward evening they came to the head of a valley, where a wind came to them carrying the rich scent of flowers. The Queen lifted her head and took in a deep breath ; then she said, "If I have to die, let me die under the scent of those flowers !"

They went on till they came to a little garden lying in a curl of the valley. There in the centre of a lawn stood the great bush white with bloom, and a sweet fragrance blew out of it, filling all that space.

"If I must die," said the Queen again, "let me lie down and drink in the scent of those flowers ; afterwards I shall not complain." So the King's foster-brother gave her leave to go and lie down under the

tree, and sat down close at hand to keep watch, so that she should not escape.

A small blue bird came and perched upon the bush over her head.

“Syringa, Syringa !” cried the bird, and two white blossoms fell off like kisses upon the Queen’s face. She lifted her hands and threw kisses up to the flowers, and more and more they came down and settled upon her face.

“Syringa, Syringa !” sang the bird ; and, hearing it, the King’s foster-brother’s heart became ready to break for grief.

The twilight deepened in the air around. All through the hours the bird sang on, and the flowers dropped down like pale tired moths in the dusk of the summer’s night, till where the Queen lay became white with a mass of blossoms that never stirred.

The heart of the King’s foster-brother grew heavier ; “What if, after all, she be not wicked but good ! To-morrow at sunrise I must kill her.”

“Syringa, Syringa !” cried the bird.

Towards dawn he saw the tree all blossomless, only a great heap of petals, like a snow-covered grave, showed where the

Queen lay; and the song of the bird had stopped.

"If she sleeps now," thought the King's foster-brother, "it will be merciful." He drew out his sharp hunting-knife, and went softly up to the spot to carry out the King's command.

So covered was she with blossoms, he could not tell which way lay her head; the heaviness of their dying scent almost made him swoon. Softly with his hand he brushed the petals apart to find a place where he might strike.

How deeply they lay! They seemed to be without end here in the centre of all. Presently his hand came upon green grass bent with the weight of blossoms, and dank with dew. He shut his eyes and started away, for the colour and the touch made a strange sorrow in his heart, and he knew that the Queen was not there.

He went away to the furthest part of the garden, and returned, and again searched, and still she was not there; only blossoms in a pile, and under them green grass.

"Syringa, Syringa!" sang the bird; and now there was a sort of triumph in its note.

The King's foster-brother turned and went back to the city. All the way the blossoms drifted and blew after him along the track ; till at evening he stood at the palace door in a wind of syringa scent, and dead flowers blew over his feet as he crossed the threshold.

Then he told the King all that he had seen and heard, and the King knew surely that his Queen, who had died so gentle and beloved a death, had been innocent of the crime laid to her charge. So great was his grief he could not rest ; that very night he rose and journeyed till he came by day to the little garden ; there he found the tree blossomless, and in the top of it he heard the blue bird crying, "Syringa, Syringa," sadly and without ceasing.

But to the King there came no sign or sound of his love. He laid his head upon the ground at the foot of the tree, sighing, "My love, you lay three years with your ear to the ground listening for my feet ; now I will lie and listen for yours !"

All the grass became wet with the tears of sorrow that the King shed ; the tree waved and grew more green. In three days new blossoms looked out among the

leaves ; at night they fell upon his face, and he dreamed that Syringa's lips were laid to his ear, and the tale of her betrayal whispered to him.

Then, knowing all, but determined for a time to let the truth lie buried in his heart, he caused the tree to be lifted from the ground and carried back and set secretly in the palace garden. And of all this, and of what he knew, he said nothing to the Queen-widow.

To the little blue bird that had followed the tree, and perched in its boughs, he said, "Be silent, little blue bird, and do not sing that name here." At his word the little blue bird became silent as death, and sat motionless in the heart of the tree, never once breathing Syringa's name.

At night the Prince would come and press his lips to the leaves of the tree and whisper, "Ah, love, how long is my heart to stay broken ? And when will forgiveness blossom ?"

But to the Queen-widow it appeared that the Prince was recovering from his grief ; and when a year had gone round she began wooing him by stealth, seeming to pity him for the sorrow that the wickedness of his dead Queen had caused him.

Little by little he seemed to listen and open his heart to her ; once he said, " All my grief would go if one whom I love could know that my heart, which once turned from her, has become wholly hers again."

When the Queen-widow heard that said, she thought, " Surely now, in a short time, all my schemes are to be brought to a good end."

One day as they walked and talked together in the gardens of the palace, they came upon a tree white and covered with blossom. " How I love that flower ! " said the King ; but the Queen-widow as soon as she smelt the scent of it turned pale and trembled. Up among the branches sat a little blue bird silently.

" Come here, and sit under this tree," said the King, " and let me speak freely, for I am in sore want of a wife ! " He drew her close under the leaves of the tree. " Here," he thought, " I will make her speak ; she shall confess all ! " Over them a bough leaned down.

One of its blossoms touched the Queen-widow on the throat. " It has bitten me ! " she shrieked. The branch sprang away, the whole tree opened and waved. Out of it

the blossoms flew like a white swarm of angry bees.

"Syringa, Syringa!" cried the bird.

The Queen-widow caught herself by the throat and moaned, and lay down upon the grass to die.

As soon as her breath was gone, all the blossoms rose up again like a white column of cloud; down into their midst flew the blue bird.

Then, this way and that, the blossoms cast themselves loose into the wind, and out of their midst came Syringa herself, carrying her child in her arms. At her feet the Queen-widow lay quite dead, with her hand upon her throat. The little blue birds in the palace had broken out of their cage and were calling for their mothers with childish voices and laughter.

But the King knelt down before Syringa's feet, pale and trembling, seeking pardon for having ever believed in her guilt. Swiftly Queen Syringa bent down, and in token of forgiveness held her child's lips to his. Over them both her face and breath were fragrant as a garden full of sunshine.

When the King had kissed the child's lips, she gave him her own.

THE TRAVELLER'S SHOES

TO
MARY AND EMILY





THE TRAVELLER'S SHOES



LONG while ago there lived a young cobbler named Lubin, who, when his father died, was left with only the shop and the shoe-leather out of which to make his fortune. From morning to night he toiled, making and mending the shoes of the poor village folk ; but his earnings were small, and he seemed never able to get more than three days ahead of poverty.

One day, as he sat working at his window-bench, the door opened, and in came a traveller. He had on a pair of long red shoes with pointed ends ; but of one the seams had split, so that all his toes were coming out of it.

The stranger, putting up one foot after the other, took off both shoes, and giving that one which wanted cobbling to Lubin,

he said : " To-night I shall be sleeping here at the inn ; have this ready in good time to-morrow, for I am in haste to go on ! " And having said this he put the other shoe into his pocket, and went out of the door barefoot.

" What a funny fellow," thought Lubin, " not to make the most of one shoe when he has it ! " But without stopping to puzzle himself he took up the to-be-mended shoe and set to work. When it was finished he threw it down on the floor behind him, and went on working at his other jobs. He meant to work late, for he had not enough money yet to get himself his Sunday's dinner ; so when darkness shut in he lighted a rushlight and cobbled away, thinking to himself all the while of the roast meat that was to be his reward.

It came close on midnight, and he was just putting on the last heel of the last pair of shoes when he was aware of a noise on the floor behind him. He looked round, and there was the red shoe with the pointed toe, cutting capers and prancing about by itself in the middle of the room.

" Peace on earth ! " exclaimed Lubin. " I never saw a shoe do a thing so tipsy

before !” He went up and passed his hand over it and under it, but there was nothing to account for its caperings ; on it went, up and down, toeing and heeling, skipping and sliding, as if for a very wager. Lubin could even tell himself the name of the reel and the tune that it was dancing to, for all that the other foot was missing. Presently the shoe tripped and toppled, falling heel up upon the floor ; nor, although Lubin watched it for a full hour, did it ever start upon a fresh jig.

Soon after daybreak, when Lubin had but just opened his shutters and sat himself down to work, in came the traveller, limping upon bare feet, with the shoe’s fellow pointing its red toe out of his pocket. “Oh, so,” he said, seeing the other shoe ready mended and waiting for him, “how much am I owing you for the job ?”

“Just a gold piece,” said Lubin, carelessly, carrying on at his work.

“A gold piece for the mere mending of a shoe !” cried the stranger. “You must be either a rogue or a funny fellow.”

“Neither !” said Lubin, “and for mending a shoe my charge is only a penny ; but for mending *that* shoe, and for all the worry

and temptation to make it my own and run off with it—a gold piece ! ”

“ To be sure, you are an honest fellow,” said the traveller, “ and honesty is a rare gift ; though, had you made off with it, I should have soon caught you. Still, you were not so wise as to know that, so here’s your gold piece for you.” He pulled out a big bag of gold as he spoke, pouring its contents out on to the window bench.

“ That is a lot of money for a lonely man to carry about,” said Lubin. “ Are you not afraid ? ”

“ Why, no,” answered the man. “ I have a way, so that I can always follow it up even if I lose it.” He took two of the gold pieces, and dropped one into the sole of each shoe as he was putting them on. “ There ! ” said he, “ now, if any man steal my money, I need only wait till it is midnight ; and then I have but to say to my shoes ‘ Seek ! ’ and up they jump, with me in them, and carry me to where my stolen property is, were it to the world’s end. It is as if they had the nose and sagacity of a pair of bloodhounds. Ah, son of a cobbler, had you run off with the one I should have very soon caught you

with the other ; for if one walks the other is bound to follow. But, as you were honest, we part friends ; and I trust God may bring you to fortune." Then the traveller did up his bag of gold, nodded to the cobbler from the doorway, and was gone.

Lubin laid down his work, and went off to the inn. "Did anything happen here last night?" he asked.

"Nothing of much note," answered the innkeeper. "Three travelling fiddlers were here, and afterwards a man came in barefoot, but with a red shoe sticking out of his pocket. I thought of turning the fellow away, till he let me see the colour of his gold. Presently the fiddlers started to play and the other man to drink. At first when they called on him to dance he excused himself for his feet's sake ; but presently, what with the music and the liquor, he got so lively in his head that he pulled on his one shoe and danced like three ordinary men put together."

"What time was that?" asked Lubin.

"Getting on for midnight," answered the innkeeper.

"Ah!" said Lubin, and went home thinking much on the way.

Towards evening he found that he had run out of leather, and must go into the town, ten miles off, to buy more. "Now my gold piece comes in handy," thought he ; so he locked up the house, put the key in his pocket, and set out.

Though it was the season of long days it was growing dark when he came to a part of the road that led through the wood ; but being so poor a man he had no fear, nor thought at all about the robbers who were said to be in those parts. But as he went, he saw all at once by the side of the road two red spikes sticking up out of a ditch, their bright colour making them plain to the eye. He came quite near and saw that they were two red shoes with pointed toes ; and then he saw more clearly that along with them lay the traveller, his wallet empty and with a dagger stuck through his heart.

The cobbler's son was as sorry as he could be. "Alas, poor soul," thought he, "what good are the shoes to you now ? Now that thieves have killed you and taken away your gold, surely I do no harm if I give an honest man your shoes !" He stooped down, and was about taking them off when he saw the eyes of the dead man open. The eyes

looked at him as if they would remind him of something ; and at once, when he loosed hold of the shoes, they seemed satisfied. Then he remembered, and thought to himself, "The world has many marvels in it ; I will wait till midnight and see."

For over three hours he kept watch by the dead man's side. "Only last night," he said to himself, "this poor fellow was dancing as merry a measure as ever I saw, for the half of it surely I saw ; and now !" Then he judged that midnight must be come, so he bent over the shoes and whispered to them but one word.

The dead man stood up in his shoes and began running. Lubin followed close, keeping an eye on him, for the shoes made no sound on the earth. They ran on for two hours, till they had come to the thickest part of the forest ; then some way before them Lubin began to see a light shining. It came from a small square house in a court-yard, and round the court-yard lay a deep moat ; only one narrow plank led over and up to the entrance.

The red shoes, carrying the dead man, walked over, and Lubin followed them. When they were at the other side they

turned, facing toward the plank that they had crossed, and Lubin seemed to read in the dead man's eye what he was to do.

Then he turned and lifted the plank away from over the moat, so that there was no longer any entrance or exit to the place. Through the window of the house he could see the three fiddlers quarrelling over the dead man's gold.

The red shoes went on, carrying their dead owner, till they got to the threshold, and there stopped. Then Lubin came and clicked up the latch, and pushed open the door, and in walked the dead man with the dagger sticking out of his heart.

The three fiddlers, when they saw that sight, dropped their gold and leapt out of the window ; and as they fled, shrieking, thinking to cross the moat by the plank-bridge that was no longer there, one after the other they fell into the water, and, clutching each other by the throat, were drowned.

But the red shoes stayed where they were, and, tilting up his feet, let the traveller go gently upon the ground ; and when Lubin held down the lantern to his face, on it lay a good smile, to tell him that the dead man thanked him for all he had done.

So in the morning Lubin went and fetched a priest to pray for the repose of the traveller's soul, and to give him good burial ; and to him he gave all the dead man's money, but for himself he took the red shoes with the pointed toes, and set out to make his fortune in the world.

Walking along he found that however far he went he never grew tired. When he had gone on for more than a hundred miles, he came to the capital where the King lived with his Court.

All the flags of the city were at half-mast, and all the people were in half mourning. Lubin asked at the first inn where he stopped what it all meant.

"You must indeed be a stranger," said his host, "not to know, for 'tis now nearly a year since this trouble began ; and this very night more cause for mourning becomes due."

"Tell me of it, then," said Lubin, "for I know nothing at all."

"At least," returned the innkeeper, "you will know how, a little more than a year ago, the Queen, who was the most beautiful woman in the world, died, leaving the King with twelve daughters, who, after her, were

reckoned the fairest women on earth, though the King says that all their beauty rolled into one would not equal that of his dead wife ; and, indeed, poor man, there is no doubt that he loved her devotedly during her life, and mourns for her continually now she is dead."

"Only a small part of all this have I known," said Lubin.

"Well, but at least," said the innkeeper, "you will have heard how the Princesses were famed for their hair ; so beautiful it was, so golden, and so long ! And now, at every full moon, one of them goes bald in a night ; and bald her head stays as a stone, for never an inch of hair grows on it again ; and with her hair all her beauty goes pale, so that she is but the shadow of her former self—a thin-blooded thing, as if a vampire had come and sucked out half her life. Yes ; ten months this has happened, and ten of the Princesses have lost their looks and their hair as well ; and now only the Princess Royal and the youngest of all remain untouched ; and doubtless one of them is to lose her crop to-night."

"But how does it happen ?" cried Lubin,

"Is no one put to keep watch, to guard them from the thing being done?"

"Ah! you talk, you talk!" said the innkeeper. "How? The King has offered half his kingdom to anyone who can tell him how the mischief is done; and the other half to the man who will put an end to it. To put it shortly, if you believe yourself a clever enough man, you may have the King for your father-in-law, with the pick of his daughters for your bride, and be his heir and lord of all when he dies!"

"For such a reward," said Lubin, "has no man made the attempt?"

"Aye, one a month; every time there has been some man fool enough to think himself so clever; and he has been turned out of the palace next day with his ears cropped."

"I will risk having my ears cropped," said Lubin; for his heart was sorry for the young Princesses, and the vanishing of their beauty. So he went up and knocked at the gates of the palace.

They went and told the King that a new man had come willing and wanting to have his ears cropped on the morrow. "Well,

well," said the King, "let the poor fool in!" for indeed he had given up all hope. From the King Lubin heard the whole story over again. The old man sighed so, it took him whole hours to tell it.

"I would be glad to be your son," said Lubin, when the King had ended; "but I would like better to make you rid of your sorrow."

"That is kind of you," said the King. "Perhaps I will only crop one of your ears to-morrow."

"When may one see the Princesses?" asked Lubin.

"They will be down to supper, presently," answered the King; "then you shall see them, what there is left of them."

Though it was reckoned that the next day Lubin would have to be drummed out of the palace with his ears cropped short, on this day he was to be treated like an honoured guest. When they went in to supper the King made him sit upon his right hand.

The twelve Princesses came in, their heads bowed down with weeping; all were fair, but ten of them were thin and pale, and wore white wimples over their heads

like nuns ; only the Princess Royal, who was the eldest, and Princess Lyneth, who was the youngest, had gold hair down to their feet, and were both so shinningly beautiful that the poor cobbler was altogether dazzled by the sight of them.

The King looked out of the window and said : “ Heigho ! There is the full moon beginning to rise.” Then they all said grace, and sat down.

But when the viands were handed round, all the Princesses sat weeping into their plates, and seemed unable to eat anything. For the pale and thin ones said : “ To-night another of our sisters will lose her golden hair and her good looks, and be like us ! ” Therefore they wept.

And Lyneth said : “ To-night, either my dear sister or myself will fall under the spell ! ” Therefore she wept more than the other ten. But the Princess Royal sat trembling, and crying :

“ To-night I know that the curse is to fall upon me, and me only ! ” Therefore she wept more than all.

Lubin sat, and watched, and listened, with his head bent down over his golden plate. “ Which of these two shall I try

most to save?" he thought. "How shall I test them, so as to know? If I could only tell which of them was to lose her hair to-night, then I might do something."

He saw that the youngest sister cried so much that she could eat nothing; but the Princess Royal, between her bursts of grief, picked up a morsel now and again from her plate, and ate it as though courage or despair reminded her that she must yet strive to live.

When the meat-courses were over, the King said to the Princesses: "I wish you would try to eat a little pudding! Here is a very promising youth, who is determined by all that is in him that harm shall happen to none of you to-night."

"To-morrow he will be sent away with his ears cut short!" said Princess Lyneth; and her tears, as she spoke, ran down over the edge of her plate on to the cloth.

When supper was over the Princess Royal came up to Lubin, and said: "Do not be angry with my sister for what she said! It has only been too true of many who came before; to-night, unless you do better than them all, I shall lose my hair. It has been a wonder to me how I have

been spared so long, seeing that I am the eldest, and, as some will have it, the fairest. Will you keep a good guard over me to-night, as though you knew for certain that I am to be the one this time to suffer?"

"I will guard you as my own life," said Lubin, "if you will but do as I ask you."

"Pledge yourself to me, then, in this cup!" said she, and lifted to his lips a bowl of red wine. Over the edge of it her eyes shone beautifully; he drank, gazing into their clear depth.

"Where am I to be for the night," he asked of the King, "so that I may watch over the two Princesses?"

The King took him to a chamber with two further doors that opened out of it. "Here," said the King, "you are to sleep, and in the inner rooms sleep the Princess Royal and the Princess Lyneth. There is no entrance or exit to them but through this; therefore, when you are here with your door bolted, one would suppose that you had them safe. Alas! ten other men have tried like you to ward off the harm, and have failed; and so to-day I have ten daughters with no looks left to them, and no hair upon their heads."

As they were speaking, the two Princesses, with their sisters, came up to bed. And the pale ones, wearing their white wimples, came and kissed the golden hair of the other two, crying over it, and saying, "To one of you we are saying good-bye; to-morrow one of you will be like us!" Then they went away to their sleeping-place, and the Princess Royal and Lyneth kissed each other, and parted weeping, each into her own chamber.

"Watch well over us!" said Lyneth to Lubin, as she passed through. "Watch over me!" said the Princess Royal. And then the two doors were closed.

Lubin said to the King, "Could I now see the two Princesses, without being seen by them, it would help me to know what to do."

"Come down to my cabinet," said the King. "I have an invisible cap there, that I can lend you if you think you can do any good with it." So they went; and the King reached down the cap from the wall and gave it to Lubin.

"Now, good-night, your Majesty," said Lubin; "I will do for you all I can."

The King answered, "Either you shall

be my son-in-law to-morrow, or you shall have no ears. My wishes are with you that the former state may be yours."

Lubin went into his chamber and closed and bolted the door ; then he put the bed up against it. "Now, at least," he thought, "there are three of us, and no more !" He put on his invisible cap, and going softly to the Princess Royal's door, opened it and peeped in.

She stood up before her glass, combing out her long gold hair, and smiling proudly because of its beauty. She gathered it up by all its ends and kissed it ; then, letting it fall, she went on combing as before.

Lubin went out, closing the door again ; then he took off his cap and knocked, and presently he heard the Princess Royal saying, "Come in !" She was lying down upon the bed, squeezing her eyes with her hands.

"Princess," he said, "I will watch over you like my own life, if you will do what I bid you. I am but a poor man, and the best that I can do is but poor ; but I think, if you will, I can save your head from becoming as bare as a billiard ball."

The Princess asked him how.

"You know," said he, "that to-night something is to happen to one of you" ("To me?" said the Princess), "and all your hair will be stolen in such a way that nothing will ever make it grow again. See, here I have a pair of common scissors; let me but cut your hair close off all over your head, and then who can steal it? For a few months you will be a fright, but it can grow again."

"I think you are a silly fellow!" said the Princess. "Better for you to get to bed, and have your ears cropped quietly in the morning! After all, it may be my sister's turn to lose her hair, not mine. I shall not make myself a fright for a year of my life in order to save you."

"If you think so poorly of my offer," said Lubin, "I had better go to bed and sleep, and not trouble the Princess Lyneth at all with it."

"No, indeed!" said the Princess Royal. "Go to bed and sleep, poor fool!" And, in truth, Lubin was feeling so sleepy that he could hardly keep open his eyes.

Then he left her, and, pulling the invisible cap once more over his head, crept softly into Princess Lyneth's chamber.

She was standing before her glass with all her beautiful hair flowing down from shoulders to feet ; and tears were falling fast out of her eyes as she kept drawing her hair together in her hands, kissing and moaning over it.

Then Lubin went out again, and, taking off his cap, knocked softly at the door.

“Come in !” said the Princess ; and when he went in she was still standing before the glass weeping and moaning for her beautiful hair, that might never see another day. On the bed was lying a white wimple, ready for her to put on when her head was become bald.

“Princess,” said Lubin, very humbly, “will you help me to save your beautiful hair, by doing what I ask ?”

“What is it that you ask ?” said she.

“Only this,” he answered ; “I am a poor man, and cannot do much for you, but only my best. To-night you or your sister must lose your hair ; and we know that afterwards, if that happen, it can never grow again. Now, come, here I have a common pair of scissors ; if I could cut your hair quite short, in a few months it will grow again, and there will be nothing to-night

that the Fates can steal. Will you let me do this for you in true service?"

The Princess looked at him, and looked at her glass. "Oh, my hair, my hair!" she moaned. Then she said, "What matters it? You mean to be good to me, and a month is the most that my fortune can last. If I do not lose it to-night, I lose it at the next full moon!" Then she shut her eyes and bade him take off all he wished. When he had finished, she picked up the wimple and covered her head with it; but Lubin took up the long coil of gold hair and wound it round his heart.

He knelt down at her feet. "Princess," he said, "be sure now that I can save you! Only I have one other request to make."

"What is that?" asked the Princess.

He took off one of his red shoes with the pointed toes. "Will you, for a strange thing, put on this shoe and wear it all to-night in your sleep? And in the morning I will ask you for it again."

The Princess promised faithfully that she would do so. Even before he had left the room she had put foot in it, promising that only he should take it off again.

Lubin's eyes were shut down with sleep

as he groped his way to bed ; he lay down with the other red shoe upon his foot. " Watch for your fellow ! " he said to it ; and then his senses left him and he was fast asleep.

In the middle of the night, while he was deep in slumber, the red shoe caught him by the foot and yanked him out of bed ; he woke up to find himself standing in the middle of the room, and there before him stood the two doors of the inner chambers open ; through that of the Princess Royal came a light. He heard the Princess Lyneth getting very softly out of her bed, and presently she stood in the doorway, with her hands out and her eyes fast shut ; and the red shoe was on one foot, and the white wimple on her head. Little tears were running down from under her closed lids ; and she sighed continually in her sleep. " Have pity on me ! " she said.

She crossed slowly from one door to the other ; and Lubin, putting on his invisible cap, crept softly after her. The Princess Royal's chamber was empty, but her glass was opened away from the wall like a door, and beyond lay a passage and steps. At the top of the steps was another door, and

through it light came, and the sound of a soft voice singing.

Princess Lyneth, knowing nothing in her sleep, passed along the passage and up the steps till she came to the further doorway. Looking over her shoulder Lubin saw the Princess Royal sitting before a loom. In it lay a great cloth of gold, like a bride's mantle, into which she was weaving the last threads of her skein. Close to her side lay a pair of great shears that shone like blue fire ; and while she sang they opened and snapped, keeping time to the music she made.

Without ever turning her head the Princess Royal sat passing her fingers along the woof and crying :

“ Sister, sister, bring me your hair,
Of our Mother's beauty give me your share.
You must grow pale, while I must grow fair ! ”

And while she was so singing, Lyneth drew nearer and nearer, with her eyes fast shut, and the white wimple over her head. “ Have pity on me ! ” she said, speaking in her sleep.

As soon as the Princess Royal heard that she laughed for joy, and catching up the

great flaming shears, turned herself round to where Lyneth was standing. Then she opened the shears, and took hold of the wimple, and pulled it down.

All in a moment she was choking with rage, for horrible was the sight that met her eye. "Ah! cobbler's son," cried she, "you shall die for this! To-morrow not only shall you have your two ears cropped, but you shall die: do not be afraid!"

Lubin looked at her and smiled, knowing how little she thought that he heard her words. "Ah! Princess Royal," he said to himself, "there is another who should now be afraid, but is not."

Then for very spite the Princess began slapping her sister's face. "Ah! wicked little sister," she cried, "you have cheated me this time! But go back and wait till your hair has grown, and then my gown of gold shall be finished, although this once you have been too sly!" She threw down the shears, and drove her sister back by stair and passage, and through the looking-glass door at the other end.

Lubin following, stayed first to watch how by a secret spring the Princess Royal closed the mirror back into the wall; then

he slipped on before, and taking off his cap, lay down on his bed pretending to be fast asleep. He heard Princess Lyneth return to her couch, and then came the Princess Royal and ground her teeth at him in the darkness.

Presently she, too, returned to her bed and lay down ; and an hour after Lubin got up very softly and went into her chamber. There she lay asleep, with her beautiful hair all spread out upon the pillow ; but Lubin had Princess Lyneth's hair wound round his heart. He touched the secret spring, so that the mirror opened to him, and he passed through toward the little chamber where stood the loom.

There hung the cloth of gold, all but finished ; beside it the shears opened and snapped, giving out a blue light. He took up the shears in his hand, and pulled down the gold web from the loom, and back he went, closing the mirror behind him.

Then he came to the Princess Royal as she lay asleep ; and first he laid the cloth of gold over her, and saw how at once she became ten times more fair than she was by rights, as fair almost as her dead mother, lacking one part only. But her beauty did not win him to have pity on her.

“There can be thieves, it seems, in high places !” he said ; and with that he opened the shears over her head and let them snap : then all her long hair came out by the roots, and she lay white and withered before his eyes, and as bald as a stone.

He gathered up all her hair with one hand, and the cloth of gold with the other, and went quietly away. Then, hiding the shears in a safe place, first he burnt the Princess Royal’s hair, till it became only a little heap of frizzled cinders ; and after that he went to the chamber of the ten Princesses, whose hair and whose sweet youth had been stolen from them. There they lay all in a row in ten beds, with pale, gentle faces, asleep under their white wimples.

He went to the first, and, laying the cloth of hair over her, cried :

“ Sister, sister, I bring you your hair,
Of your Mother’s beauty I give you your share.
One must grow pale, but you must grow fair ! ”

And as he said the words one part of the cloth unwove itself from the rest, and ran in ripples up the coverlet, and on to the pillow where the Princess’s head lay. There it coiled itself under the wimple, a great

mass of shining gold, and the face of the Princess flushed warm and lovely in her sleep.

Lubin passed on to the next bed, and there uttered the same words; and again one part of the web came loose, and wound itself about the sleeper's face, that grew warm and lovely at its touch. So he went from bed to bed, and when he came to the end there was no more of the web left.

He went back into his own chamber, laughing in his heart for joy, and there he dropped himself between the sheets and fell into a sound slumber.

He was wakened in the morning by the King knocking and trying to get into the room. Lubin pulled back the bed, and in came the King with a mournful countenance.

"Which of them is it?" said he.

"Go and ask them!" said Lubin.

The King went over and knocked at the Princess Royal's door; the knocking opened her eyes. Lubin heard her suddenly utter a yell. "Ah! now she has looked at herself in the glass," thought he.

"What is the matter?" called the King. "Come out and let me look at you!" But

the Princess Royal would not come out. She ran quick to her mirror, and touched the secret spring. "At least," she thought, "though fiends have robbed me of all my beauty, I can get it back by wearing the cloth woven from my sisters' hair!" She skipped along the passage and up the steps to the little chamber where the loom was.

The King, getting no answer, went across and knocked at Lyneth's door; she came out, all fresh in her beauty, but wearing upon her head the wimple. "Ah!" said the King dolorously; and he snipped his fingers at Lubin.

Lubin laughed out. "But look at her face!" he said. "Surely she is beautiful enough?"

The Princess lifted up her wimple, and showed the King her hair all short beneath. "That was my doing," said Lubin; "'twas the way of saving it."

"What a Dutchman's remedy!" cried the King; and just then the Princess Royal's door flew open.

She came out tearing herself to pieces with rage; her face was pale and thin, and her head was as bare as a billiard ball. "Have that clown of a cobbler killed!"

she cried in a passion. "That fool, that numbskull, that cheat! Have him beheaded, I say!"

"No, no, I am only to have one of my ears cropped off!" said Lubin, looking hard at her all the time.

"I am not at all sure," said the King. "You have done foolishly and badly, for not only have you let the disease go on, but your very remedy is as bad. Two heads of hair gone in one night! You had better have kept away. If the Princesses wish it, certainly I will have you put to death."

"Will you not see the other Princesses too?" asked Lubin. "Let them decide between them whether I am to live or die!"

The King was just going to call for them, when suddenly the ten Princesses opened the door of their chamber, and stood before him shining like stars, with all their golden hair running down to their feet.

"Now put me to death!" said Lubin; and all the time he kept his eye upon the Princess Royal, who turned flame-coloured with rage.

"No, indeed!" cried the King. "Now you must be more than pardoned! You see, my dears," he said to Lyneth and the

Princess Royal, "though you have suffered, your sisters have recovered all that they lost. They are ten to two ; and I can't go back on arithmetic ; I am bound to do even more than pardon him for this."

"Indeed and indeed yes !" replied the Princess Lyneth. "He has done ten times more than we thought of asking him !" And she went from one to another of her recovered sisters, kissing their beautiful long hair for pure gladness of heart. But when she came to the Princess Royal, she kissed her many times, and stooped down her face upon her shoulder, and cried over her.

"Tell me now," said the King to Lubin, "for you are a very wonderful fellow, how did it all happen ?"

Lubin looked at the Princess Royal ; after all he could not betray a lady's secret. "I cannot tell you," he said ; "if I did, there would be a death in the family."

"Well," said the King, "however you may have done it, I own that you have earned your reward. You have only to choose now with which of my daughters you will become my son-in-law. From this day you shall be known as my heir." He

ranged all the Princesses in line, according to their ages. "Now choose," said the King, "and choose well!"

Lubin went up to the Princess Royal. "I won't have you!" he said, looking very hard at her; and the Princess Royal dropped her eyes. Then he went on to the next. "Sweet lady," he said, "I dare not ask one with such beautiful hair as yours to marry me, who am a poor cobbler's son." But all the while he had the Princess Lyneth's hair bound round his heart.

He went on from one to another, and of each he kissed the hand, saying that she was too fair to marry him.

He came to Lyneth, and knelt down at her feet. "Lyneth," he said, "will you give the poor cobbler back his shoe?"

Lyneth, looking in his eyes, saw all that he meant. "And myself in it," she said, "for you love me dearly!" She put her arms round his neck, and whispered, "You marry me because I am a fright, and have no hair!"

But Lubin said, "I have your hair all wound round my heart, making it warm!"

So they were married, and lived together more happily than cobbler and princess ever

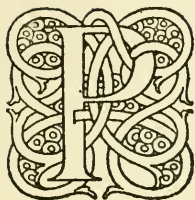
lived in the world before. And the cobbler dropped mending shoes : only his wife's shoes he always mended. Very soon Lyneth's hair grew again, more shining and beautiful than before ; but the Princess Royal remained pale, and thin, and was bald to the day of her death.

THE MOON FLOWER

TO
EVA AND KATIE



THE MOON-FLOWER



RINCESS BERENICE sat by a window of her father's palace, looking out of the Moon. In her hand she held a great white pearl, and smiled, for it was her mother's birthday gift. The chamber in which she sat was of pure silver, and in the floor was a small window by which she could see out of the Moon and right down on to the Earth, where the moonbeams were going. There it lay like a great green emerald ; and wherever the clouds parted to let the moonbeams go through, she could see the tops of the trees, and broad fields with streams running by.

"Yonder is the land of the coloured stones," she said to herself, "that the merchants go down the moonbeams and bring

home and sell." And as she bent lower and lower and gazed with curious eyes, the great pearl rolled from her hand and fell out of the Moon, and went slipping and sliding down a moonbeam, never stopping till it got to the Earth.

"My mother's pearl!" cried the Princess, "the most beautiful of all her pearls that she gave me. I must run down and bring it back; for if I wait it will be lost. And as to-night is the full-moon down there upon Earth, I can return before anyone finds out that I am gone."

The Earth was sparkling a brighter green under the approach of night. "Oh, land of the coloured stones!" cried the Princess; and, slipping through the window, she stepped out of the Moon, and went running down the same moonbeam by which the pearl had fallen.

Night came; and the Earth and the Moon lay looking at each other in the midst of heaven, like an emerald and a pearl; but through the palace, and within, over all its gardens and terraces there began to be callings on the Princess Berenice; and presently there were heart-searchings and fear, for they found the empty room

with its open window : and the Princess Berenice was not there.

Now, not long before this, upon our own Earth there had lived and died a King who had four sons, but only three kingdoms. So when he came to die he gave to each of his three eldest sons a kingdom apiece ; but to the youngest, having nothing else left to give, he gave only a pair of travelling shoes, and said : "Wear these, and some day they will take you to fortune !"

So, when the King was dead, the young Prince wore the shoes night and day, hoping that some time or another they would take him to fortune. His brothers laughed at him, and said : "Our father was wise to play those old shoes off upon you ! If it had been either of us we would have gone and bought ourselves an army and fought for a just share in the inheritance. But you seem pleased, so we ought to be."

Now one day the Prince went out hunting in the forest, and there, having become separated from all his friends, he thoroughly lost his way. Wherever he turned the wood seemed to grow denser, the thickets higher, and the solitude more than he ever remembered before. Night came on, and,

there being nothing else that he could do, he lay down and wrapped himself in his cloak and slept.

When he awoke it was day, but the woods were as still as death ; no bird sang, and not a cricket chirped among the grass. As he sat up he noticed that the shoe was gone from his left foot, nor could he see it anywhere near. " 'Tis the half of my inheritance gone ! " he said to himself, and got up to search about him. But still no shoe could he find. At last he gave up the search as useless, and set off walking without it. Then as it seemed to him so ridiculous to go limping along with only one shoe on, he took off the remaining one, and threw it away, saying : " Go, stupid, and find your fellow ! "

To the Prince's great astonishment, it set off at a rapid pace through the wood, all of its own accord. The Prince, barefoot except for his stockings, began to run after it.

Presently he found that he was losing his breath. " Hie, hie ! " he called out, " not quite so fast, little leather-skins ! " But the shoe paid him no heed and went on as before. It skipped through the grass and

brushwood, as if a young girl's foot were dancing inside it ; and whenever it came to a fallen tree, or a boulder of rock, it was up and over with a jump like a grasshopper.

Before long the Prince's stockings were in nothing but holes and tatters ; as he ran they fluttered from his legs like ribbons. He had lost his hat, and his cloak was torn into patterns, and he felt from head to foot like a house all doors and windows. He was almost on his last gasp when he saw that the shoe was making straight for a strange little house of green bronze, shut in by a high wall, and showing no windows ; and in the middle of the wall was a bronze door shut fast. As he came near he found that outside, on the doorstep, stood his other shoe as if waiting to be let in. "So it was worth running for !" thought he ; and then, putting on both shoes again, he began knocking at the door.

As he knocked the door opened. It opened in such a curious way, flat down like a swing-bridge or like the lid of a box. For some time he was half afraid to walk in on the top of it. Presently, however, he summoned up his courage and stepped across it.

The door closed behind him like a trap, and he found himself in a beautiful house ; all its walls were hung with gold and precious stones, but everywhere was the emptiness and the silence of death.

He went from room to room seeking for any that lived there, but could see no one. In one place he found thrown down a fan of white feathers and pearl ; and in another flowers, fresh plucked, lying close by a cushion dented and hollowed, as though the weight of a head or arm had rested there. But beyond these there was no sign of a living thing to be found.

Through the windows he saw deep bowery gardens hemmed in by high walls, within which grew flowers of the loveliest kinds. All the paths were of smooth grass, and everywhere were the traces of gentle handiwork ; but still not a soul was to be seen.

It seemed to the Prince now and then that there was something in the garden which moved, distinct from the flowers, and shifting with a will of its own. Though the sun shone full down, casting clear shadows across the lawns, this that he saw was altogether misty and faint. Now it

seemed like a feather blown to and fro in the wind, and now like broken gossamer threads, or like filmy edges of clouds melting away in the heat. Where it went the flowers moved as though to make way for it, swaying apart and falling together again as it passed.

The Prince watched and watched. He tired his eyes with watching, yet he could see no more ; and no way could he find to the garden, for all the doors leading to it were locked fast and barred.

There was another strange thing he noticed which seemed to him to have no meaning. All over the garden, between the trees and the sky, was stretched a silver net, so fine that it showed only as a faint film against the blue ; but a net for all that. Here and there, the light of the sun catching it, hung sparkling in its silver meshes. It was like the net that a gardener throws over strawberry beds or currant bushes to keep off the birds from the fruit. So was it with this net ; through it no bird could enter the garden, and no bird that was in the garden could leave it.

All day the Prince had these two things before his eyes to wonder about, till the

sun went down and it began to get dusk.

At the moment when the sun sank below the earth there was a sound of opening doors all over the house. The Prince ran and found one of the doors leading into the garden wide open, and through it he could see the stir of leaves, and the deep colours of the flowers growing deeper in the dusk ; only the evening primroses were lighting their soft lamps.

From a distant part of the garden came the sound of falling water, and a voice singing. As he approached he saw something shining against the dark leaves higher than the heads of the flowers ; and before he well knew what he saw, he found before his eyes the most lovely woman that the mind of man could believe in.

In her hand hung a watering-can, with the water falling from it in sprays on to the flower beds beneath. Her head was bent far down, yet how she looked slender and tall ! She was very pale, yet a soft light seemed to grow from her, the light of a new moon upon a twilight sky. And now the Prince heard clearly the sweet voice, and the words that she was singing :

“Listen, listen, listen,
O heart of the sea !
I am the Pearl of pearls,
I am the Mother of pearls,
And the Mother of thee.
Glisten, glisten, glisten,
O bed of the sea !
Lost is the Pearl of pearls,
And all the divers for pearls
Are drowning for me.”

He stood enchanted to hear her ; but the words of the song ended suddenly in a deep sigh. The singer lifted her head ; her eyes moved like grey moths in the dusk, amid the whiteness of her face. At sight of him they grew still and large, widening with a quiet wonder. Then the beautiful face broke into smiles, and the Princess stretched out her hands to him and laughed.

“Have you come,” she said, “to set me free ?”

“To set you free ?” asked the Prince.

“I am a prisoner,” she told him.

“Alas, then !” answered the Prince, “I am a prisoner also, and can free no one ; but were I now free to go wherever I would, I should be a prisoner still, for I have seen the face of the loveliest heart on earth !”

"O," she sighed, "and can you not set me free?"

"Tell me," he said, "what makes you a prisoner here?"

She pointed to the net over their heads, to the walls that stood on all sides of them, and to the ground beneath their feet. "That," she said, "and that, and this."

"Who are you?" he asked, "and where do you come from? and whose power is it that now holds you captive?"

She led him on to a terrace, from which they could see out towards the west; and there lay the new Moon, low down in the sky. "Yonder," she said, pointing to it, "is my home!" She wept. "Shall I ever return to it?"

The Prince, gazing at her in wonder, cried, "Are you one of a Fairy race?"

"No, oh, no!" she sighed, "I am but mortal like yourself; only my home is there, while yours is here. We, who dwell in the Moon, are as you are, but the sun has greater power over us; the light of it falling on us makes us pale and unsubstantial, so that we weigh not so much as a gossamer and become transparent as thin fleeces of cloud. Then we can go where

you cannot go, treading the light as it flies ; but at sunset we regain our strength, and our bodies come to us again ; and we are as you see me now—no different from yourselves, the inhabitants of the Earth.”

“Tell me,” said the Prince, “of yourself, and the dwellers in the Moon ! Is it not cold there, and barren ?”

She answered smiling, for the memory of her home was sweet to her, “Outside, the Moon is cold and barren ; but within it is very warm and rich and fertile ; more beautiful than any place I have seen on Earth. It is there we live ; and we have flocks, and herds, and woods, and rivers, and harbours, and seas. Also we have great cities built inside the Moon’s crust, for the Moon is a great hollow shell, and we walk upon its inner surface and are warm. The sunlight comes to us through craters and clefts in the ground ; and the beams of it are like solid pillars of gold that quiver and sway as they shoot upwards into the opal twilight of our world ; and the shine and the warmth of it come to us, and colour the air above our heads ; but we are safe from its full light falling on us, for the ground is between us and it. Only when we

pass through to the outer side do we become pale and faint, a mere whisper of our former selves. And then we are so light that if we step upon a moonbeam it will bear our weight ; and the moonbeam carries us swiftly as its own light travels, till it reaches the Earth : so we come. But to return there is another way."

And when the Prince asked her, she told him of the other way back into the Moon.

"When we wish to return," she went on "(for the falling light of a moonbeam cannot carry us back), we must go where there is a pool of still water, and wait for the reflection of the Moon to fall on it ; and when the Moon is full, and throws its image into the water, then we dive down, and with our lips touch the reflection of its face, crying, 'Open, open to me, for I am a Moon-child !' And the Moon will open her face like a door of pearl, and let us pass in ; and when she draws her reflection out of the pool, we find ourselves once again among our own people and in our own land. Many of us have so come and so returned," she sighed deeply, "but I fear that I shall never again return."

Then the Prince asked her further whose

power it was that held her captive ; and she told him how she had dropped the pearl that her mother had given her, and had come down seeking it. Then she said, “ In the Moon we have many jewels, for we have opals and onyxes, and pearls and moonstones, but we have no rubies, or emeralds, or sapphires, or stones of a single colour, such as you have. Therefore, we have a passion for these things, and our merchants come down and bring them back to us at a great price.

“ Now it chanced that in my search I came upon a gnome who had dealings with our merchants and had many jewels to sell, and he, seeming to be kind, helped me until my pearl was found. Then he took me to see his own treasures, and, alas, while my eyes were feasting on the colours of the stones he showed to me, my poor beauty inflamed the avarice of his evil heart, and the desire to have me for his wife became great. So when I asked him the price of his jewels, he vowed that the only price at which he would let them go was that of my own hand in marriage. Alas, I am young and innocent, and without subtlety, nor did I know how great was his power and wickedness. As I laughed at his request his

face grew dark with rage, and I saw that I had incurred the undying enmity of his cruel heart. And now for a whole year he has held me in his enchantment, striving to break me to his will by the length and weariness of my captivity ; and lest search or any help should come for me from my father's people, he has covered me in with a net, and surrounded me with walls ; and here there is no pool into which the full Moon may fall, and at the mere touch of my lips upon its face, open and draw me free from my enchantment, and back into the heart of my own land. Only yonder, in the corner of the garden is a deep well, where the Moon never shines ; so there is no way here left for me by which I may get free."

"Does not the gnome ever come to see you in your captivity?" asked the Prince. "If so, I may by some means be able to entrap him, and force him to let you go."

"Twice in the year he has visited me," answered the Princess. "He comes up out of the ground in the form of a Red Mole ; but he looks at me wickedly and cunningly with the eyes of a man, seeming to say, 'Will you have me yet?' And when I

shake my head he burrows under again, and is gone till another six months shall be past."

The Prince thought for a while and said, "I do not know whether I have the power or the wit to make you free ; if love only were needed for the work, to-morrow would see you as free as a bird."

The Princess, between smiles and sighs, said, "I have been most lonely here ; already you make my imprisonment seem less." Then she led him within doors, from room to room, showing him the splendours of her prison. Wherever they went, out of the floor before them rose burning jewels that hung hovering over their heads to light them as they passed ; and when she struck her hands together, up from the ground rose a table covered with fruit and dainties of all sorts ; and when she and the Prince had eaten, she clapped her hands again, and they disappeared by the same way that they had come.

The Prince was struck with admiration at the delicacy of these marvels. "When I think of the Red Mole, they sicken me !" said the Moon-Princess. The good youth used all his arts to cheer her, promising to

devote himself, and if need be his life, to the task of setting her free. And now and then she laughed and was almost merry again, forgetting the walls that still held her spell-bound from her own people and her own land.

She showed the Prince a chamber where he might sleep ; and so soft and warm was the couch after his last hard night on the ground, that it was full day before he awoke. The Princess Berenice appeared before him misty and faint, for the sunlight threw a veil upon her beauty ; but still as he looked at her he did not love her less, and it still seemed to him that hers was the face of the loveliest heart on earth.

All day he watched her drifting about the garden, seeming to feed herself on the scent of the flowers. In the evening, when the sun set, her body grew strong and her face shone out to him like the new Moon upon a twilight sky.

Then he drew water for her from the well, and watched her as she watered the flowers which were her only delight. Presently he said, "There is much water in the well, for the rope goes down into it many fathoms ; and yet I find no bottom."

“Yes,” answered the Princess, “I doubt not that the well is deep.”

“Before many days are over,” said the Prince, “the well shall become a pool.”

The Princess wondered to hear him. “Is there,” he went on, “no such thing as a spade for me to dig with?” Then she led him to a shed, where lay all the needed implements for gardening. So his eyes brightened, while he cried, “O, beautiful Princess Berenice, as I love you, before many weeks are over you shall be free !”

The next morning he arose very early, and in the centre of the garden, where the ground hollowed somewhat, he marked out a space and set to work to dig.

All day the Princess went to and fro, faint and pale as a mist, watching him at his work. At dusk her beauty shone full upon him, and she said, “What is this that you are doing?” He answered, “What I am making shall presently become a pool ; then when the pool is full, and the full Moon comes and shines on it, you shall go down into the water, and shall kiss the face of its reflection with your lips, and be free from your enchantment.”

Princess Berenice looked long at him,

and her eyes clung to his like soft moths in the gloom. "But you?" she said, "You are no Moon-child, and this will never set you free."

"Ever since I saw you," said the Prince, "I have not thought of freedom; my dearest wish is but to set you free."

The Princess gave him her hand. "And mine," she said, "my dearest wish henceforth is to set you free also. Yet I know but one way, and I cannot name it." She smiled tenderly on him, and bowed her face into the shadow of her hair.

The Prince caught her in his arms, "One way is my way!" he cried. "Your way," she said, "is my way." Then, when he had finished kissing her, she said, "Look, on my finger is a ring; this ring is for him to whom I give myself in marriage. Surely, it opens to him the heart of my own people, and he becomes one of us, a child of the Moon." She showed him an opal ring, full of fires. "If your way is my way," she said, "draw this off my finger, and put it upon your own, and take me to be your wife!"

So the Prince drew off the ring from her finger, and set it upon his own; and as he

did so he felt indeed the heart of the Moon-people become his own, and the love of the Moon strike root in him. Yet did the love of the Earth remain his as well, making it seem as if all the love in his heart had but doubled itself.

So he and the most beautiful Berenice were married there by the light of the new Moon, and all thought of sorrow or danger from the encirclement that bound them was lost in their great joy.

During the whole of the next day the Prince went on with his digging, making a broad shallow in the ground. "Before the full Moon comes," he said, "I will make it deep." And he worked on, refusing to take any rest.

The Princess loved him more and more as she watched him ; and his love for her daily increased, for every day, while the Moon grew full, her beauty shone in greater perfection and splendour. "Here," she said to him, "the coming of the full Moon is like the coming of Spring to me : I feel it in my blood. After the full Moon my beauty will wane and grow paler. But in my own land I do not feel these changes, for there it is always the full Moon." The

Prince answered her, "To me your beauty, though it grows more, will not ever grow less."

At last, on the day before that of the full Moon, the pit which he had dug was broad and deep; then he began to fill it with water from the well. "To-morrow," he said to his wife, when the pool was nearly full, as she came and stood by his side at sunset in the full blaze of her beauty, "to-morrow we shall be free; and you will carry me away with you into your own land."

"I do not know," said the Princess, "I begin to be afraid!" and she sighed heavily. "Any day the Red Mole may come: one day is not too soon for him to be here."

"But why need you fear him now?" asked the Prince. "Since you are married to me, you cannot be married to him."

"As to that," said she, "I fear that to have outwitted him will but make his malice all the greater against us!" Then she walked softly among the moonbeams, bathing her hands in them, and letting them fall upon the loveliness of her face; and as she stood in their light, tears rained down out of her eyes.

In the morning it seemed as if her happi-

ness had returned. The Prince, as he toiled under the blazing sun, carrying water from the well to the pool, felt her moving by his side, and heard her light shadowy laughter when, just before sunset, the water flowed level to the pool's brink. And when dusk rose out of the grass, there she stood glowing with the full Moon of her beauty, and leaning in all the light of her loveliness towards him.

The happy night drew round them ; out of the East came the glow of the full Moon as it rose ; soon, soon it would cross the tops of the trees and rest its face upon the quiet waters of the pool. They clung in each other's arms, entranced. " My beautiful," said the Prince, " shall we not take to your mother some of those jewels she loves—the green, and the red, and the blue, and the pearl which was hers, the quest of which has cost you so much ? " He ran into one of the jewelled chambers where lay the pearl, and caught from the walls the largest stones he could find. Quickly he went and returned, for the Moon was now fast cresting the avenues of the garden. He came bearing the jewels in his hands.

Princess Berenice stood no longer by the

brink of the pool, though therein lay the image of the Moon's face, a circle of pale gold upon the water. "Berenice," called the Prince, and ran through the garden, searching for her. "Berenice!" he cried by the well; but she was not there. "Berenice!" His voice grew trembling and weak, and quick fear took hold of him. "O, my beautiful, my beloved, where are you?"

Only the silence stood up to answer him. Under his feet ran a Red Mole.

It scampered across the grass, and disappeared through a burrow in the ground. Then the Prince knew that the worst had surely come, and that his Princess had been taken away from him. Where she was he could not know; within her former prison she was nowhere to be seen.

All night the Prince lay weeping by the brink of the pool, where she had last stood before his sight; the print of her dear feet still lay on the lawn where she had stayed waiting with him so long. "O, miserable wretch that I am!" he cried, kissing the trodden grass. "Now never again may I hope to behold you, or hear your dear voice!"

All the day following he wandered like a

ghost from place to place, filling the empty garden with memories of her presence, and sighing over and over again the music of her name. All the flowers glowed round him in their accustomed beauty; new buds came into life, and full blooms broke and fell; not a thing seemed to sorrow for her loss except himself. As for the flowers, he paid them little heed.

In his sleep that night a dream came to him, a dream as of something that whispered and laughed in his ear. Over and over again it seemed to be saying, "The Red Mole came, and the full Moon came, and the Princess jumped down into the water!" Then his heart knocked so loud for joy that he started awake, and saw the Red Mole scuffling away to its burrow in the ground.

Then he feared that the dream was but a thing devised to cheat his fancy, and get rid of him by making him go away and search for his Princess in the land of the Moon, by the way that she had told him. But he thought to himself, "If the Red Mole wants so much to get me away, it means that my beloved is somewhere near at hand. Is she in the well?" he began wondering; and as

soon as it was light he went to where lay the well in its corner under the shadow of the wall. But though he searched long and diligently, there was no trace of her that he could find.

Yet every time he came near to the well sorrow seemed to take hold of him, and, mixed with it, a kind of joy, as though indeed the heart of his beloved beat in this place. Near to the well stood a tall flower with bowed head. It seemed to him the only one in the whole garden that had any share in his sorrow : he wondered if the flower had grown up to mark the sad place of her burial.

“O, my beloved Berenice, art thou near me now ?” he murmured, heart-broken, one day as he passed by : then it seemed to him that all at once the flower stirred. He turned to look at it ; it was like a sunflower, but white even to its centre, and its head kept drooping as if for pure grief. “Berenice, Berenice !” he wept, passing it.

At dusk he returned again ; and now the flower’s head was lifted up, and shone with a strange lustre. The Prince, as he went by on his way to the well, saw the flower turn its head, bending its face ever towards

where he was. Then grief and joy stirred in his heart. "The flower knows where she is!" he said.

So he bent, whispering, "Where, then, is Berenice?" and the flower lifted its head, and hung quite still, looking at him.

Then the Prince whispered again, "The Red Mole came, and the full Moon came, and the Princess jumped down into the water?"

But the flower swayed its head from side to side, and the Prince found that it had answered "No."

Then he had it in his mind to ask of it further things; but, as he was about to speak, he beheld its face all brimming over with tears, that suddenly broke and fell down in a shower over its leaves.

At that his heart leaped, and his voice choked as he cried, "Art *thou* my beloved, my Berenice?" And all at once the flower swayed down, and leaned, and fell weeping against his breast.

So at last he knew! And joy and grief struggled together in him for mastery.

All that night he knelt with the flower's head upon his heart, stroking its soft leaves, and letting it rest between his

hands ; till, towards dawn, it seemed to him that peace was upon it and sleep.

All through the day it hung faint upon its stem ; but when evening came it lifted its head and shone in moon-like beauty ; and so deep for it was the Prince's love and compassion that he could hardly bear to be absent from its side one moment of the day or night.

And, when he was very weary, he lay down under its shadow to sleep ; and the Moon-flower bent down and rested its head upon his face.

All night long in dreams Berenice came back to him. He seemed to hear how the Red Mole had come, and changed her to a rooted shape, lest the full Moon in the water should carry her away from him back into her own land. Yet it was only a dream, and the Prince could learn nothing there of the way by which he might set her free.

A month went by, and he said to his Flower, " To-night is the night of the full Moon: now, if I drew you from the ground, and carried you down, and called for the Moon's face to open to us, would you not be free from the enchantment, when you were come again to your own people ? " But

the Moon-flower shook its head, as if to bid him still wait and watch patiently.

Now, as the Prince came and went day by day, he began to notice that the Moon-flower had its roots in a small green mound, no bigger than a mole-hill ; and he thought to himself, “ surely that mound was not there at first: the Red Mole must be down below at work ! ” So he watched it from day to day ; and at last he knew for certain that, as time went on, the mound grew larger.

Month by month the mound upon which the Moon-flower had root increased in size ; yet the Flower thrived, and its beauty shone brighter as each full Moon approached, so that at last the Prince’s fear lest the Red Mole were working mischief against its life, passed away.

Once, on the night of a full Moon, as the Prince lay with his head upon Earth, and the Moon-flower bowed over his face, he heard under the mound a peal of silvery laughter ; and at the sound of it the Moon-flower started, and stood erect, and a stir of delight seemed to take hold of its leaves. Again the laughter came, and the soft earth moved at the sound of it.

The Prince started up, and ran and

fetches a spade, and struck it down under the loose soil of the mound. When he lifted up the earth, out sprang a tiny child like a lobe of quicksilver, laughing merrily with its first leap into the light. But even then its laughter changed into a cry ; for out after it darted the Red Mole, with fury in its whiskers, and wrath flashing out of its eyes.

The quicksilver child sprang away, and went shrilling over the grass toward the margin of the pool. There lay the full Moon's image upon the clear stillness of the water ; and the child leapt down the bank, and laughed as it sprang safely away. Then there followed a tiny splash ; and the Prince, amid the rings upon the water's surface, saw, like a door of pearl, the Moon's face open and close again. And the Red Mole went down into the earth gnashing its teeth for rage.

The Prince ran back to the Moon-flower, and found it bent forwards and trembling with fear. Then he drew its head towards his heart, and whispered "The Red Mole came, and the full Moon came, and the silver child jumped down into the water !" And at that the Flower

lifted its head and began clapping its leaves for joy.

A month went by, and the green mound had disappeared from beneath the Moon-flower's roots ; and still every night the Prince lay down under the shadow of its leaves ; and the Flower bent over him, and laid its head against his face.

As he lay so, one night, and watched the full Moon travelling high overhead, he saw a shadow begin to cross over it ; and he knew that it was the eclipse, which is the shadow of the Earth passing over the face of the Moon ; then he rose softly, leaving the Moon-flower asleep, and went and stood by the brink of the pool.

Up in the Moon the silver child felt the shadow of the Earth fall upon the face of the Moon ; and he came and touched the Earth's shadow with his lips, crying, " Open, open to me, for I am an Earth-child ! " Then the Earth's shadow that was upon the Moon opened, and the silver child sprang through.

The Prince, watching the veiled image of the Moon's face in the water, saw the Earth's shadow open like a door, so that for an instant the brightness of the Moon

shone through, and out sprang the quick-silver child, up to the surface of the pool.

He leapt laughing up the bank, and went running over the grass to where the Moon-flower was standing. He reached up his arms, and caught the Flower by the head :

“O mother, mother, mother !” he cried as he kissed it.

And at the touch of his lips the Moon-flower opened and changed, growing wondrously tall and fair ; and the flower turned into a face, and the leaves disappeared, till it was the beautiful Princess Berenice herself, who stooped down and took the quick-silver child up into her arms.

She cried, fondling him, “Did they give you your name ?”

And the child laughed. “They call me Gammelyn,” he said.

The Prince caught them both together in his arms. “Come, come !” he shouted and laughed, “for yonder is the full Moon waiting for us !” And, lifting them up, he ran with them to the borders of the pool.

And the Red Mole came, and the full Moon came ; and the Prince, and the Princess, and the silver child jumped down into the water.

Then the Prince laid his lips against the reflection of the Earth's shadow, crying, "Open, open to me, for I am a child of the Earth!" And the shadow opened like a door to let them pass through. Then they pressed their lips against the reflection of the Moon's face crying, "Open, open to us, for we are Moon-children!" And the Moon opened her face like a door of pearl, so that they sprang through together, and were safe.

And when the Moon drew its reflection out of the pool, they found themselves in the land of the Moon, in the silver chamber with the round window, in the palace of Princess Berenice's father.

Looking out through the window, down at the end of a long moonbeam they saw the Red Mole gnashing his whiskers for rage. Then the Prince took off his shoes, and threw them with all his might down the moonbeam at the Mole.

As the shoes fell, they went faster, and and faster, and faster, till they came to earth; and they struck the Mole so hard upon the head that he died.

Now as for Gammelyn and the shoes we may hear of them again elsewhere; but as for

the Prince and his beautiful Princess Berenice, the happiness in which they lived for the rest of their days is too great even to be told of.

HAPPY RETURNS

TO
JEANNIE



HAPPY RETURNS



Y the side of a great river, whose stream formed the boundary to two countries, lived an old ferryman and his wife. All the day, while she minded the house, he sat in his boat by the ferry, waiting to carry travellers across ; or, when no travellers came, and he had his boat free, he would cast drag-nets along the bed of the river for fish. But for the food which he was able thus to procure at times, he and his wife might well have starved, for travellers were often few and far between, and often they grudged him the few pence he asked for ferrying them ; and now he had grown so old and feeble that when the river was in flood he could scarcely ferry the boat across ; and continually he feared lest a younger and stronger man should come

and take his place, and the bread from his mouth.

But he had trust in Providence. "Will not God," he said, "who has given us no happiness in this life, save in each other's help and companionship, allow us to end our days in peace?"

And his wife answered, "Yes, surely, if we trust Him enough He will."

One morning, it being the first day of the year, the ferryman going down to his boat, found that during the night it had been loosed from its moorings and taken across the river, where it now lay fastened to the further bank.

"Wife," said he, "I can remember this same thing happening a year ago, and the year before also. Who is this traveller who comes once a year, like a thief in the night, and crosses without asking me to ferry him over?"

"Perhaps it is the good folk," said his wife. "Go over and see if they have left no coin behind them in the boat."

The old man got on to a log and poled himself across, and found, down in the keel of the boat, the mark of a man's bare foot driven deep into the wood; but there

was no coin or other trace to show who it might be.

Time went on ; the old ferryman was all bowed down with age, and his body was racked with pains. So slow was he now in making the passage of the stream, that all travellers who knew those parts took a road higher up the bank, where a stronger ferryman plied.

Winter came ; and hunger and want pressed hard at the old man's door. One day while he drew his net along the stream, he felt the shock of a great fish striking against the meshes down below, and presently, as the net came in, he saw a shape like living silver, leaping and darting to and fro to find some way of escape. Up to the bank he landed it, a great gasping fish.

When he was about to kill it, he saw, to his astonishment, tears running out of its eyes, that gazed at him and seemed to reproach him for his cruelty. As he drew back, the Fish said : " Why should you kill me, who wish to live ? "

The old man, altogether bewildered at hearing himself thus addressed, answered : " Since I and my wife are hungry, and

God gave you to be eaten, I have good reason for killing you."

"I could give you something worth far more than a meal," said the Fish, "if you would spare my life."

"We are old," said the ferryman, "and want only to end our days in peace. To-day we are hungry; what can be more good for us than a meal which will give us strength for the morrow, which is the new year?"

The Fish said: "To-night some one will come and unfasten your boat, and ferry himself over, and you know nothing of it till the morning, when you see the craft moored out yonder by the further bank."

The old man remembered how the thing had happened in previous years, directly the Fish spoke. "Ah, you know that then! How is it?" he asked.

"When you go back to your hut at night to sleep, I am here in the water," said the Fish. "I see what goes on."

"What goes on, then?" asked the old man, very curious to know who the strange traveller might be.

"Ah," said the Fish, "if you could only catch him in your boat, he could give you

something you might wish for ! I tell you this : do you and your wife keep watch in the boat all night, and when he comes, and you have ferried him into mid-stream, where he cannot escape, then throw your net over him and hold him till he pays you for all your ferryings.”

“How shall he pay me ? All my ferryings of a lifetime !”

“Make him take you to the land of Returning Time. There, at least, you can end your days in peace.”

The old man said : “You have told me a strange thing ; and since I mean to act on it, I suppose I must let you go. If you have deceived me, I trust you may yet die a cruel death.”

The Fish answered : “Do as I tell you, and you shall die a happy one.” And, saying this, he slipped down into the water and disappeared.

The ferryman went back to his wife supperless, and said to her : “Wife, bring a net, and come down into the boat !” And he told her the story of the Fish and of the yearly traveller.

They sat long together under the dark bank, looking out over the quiet and cold

moonlit waters, till the midnight hour. The air was chill, and to keep themselves warm they covered themselves over with the net and lay down in the bottom of the boat. It was the very hour when the old year dies and the new year is born.

Before they well knew that they had been asleep, they started to feel the rocking of the boat, and found themselves out upon the broad waters of the river. And there in the fore-part of the boat, clear and sparkling in the moonlight, stood a naked man of shining silver. He was bending upon the pole of the boat, and his long hair fell over it right down into the water.

The old couple rose up quietly, and unwinding themselves from the net, threw it over the Silver Man, over his head and hands and feet, and dragged him down into the bottom of the boat.

The old man caught the ferry pole, and heaved the boat still into the middle of the stream. As he did so a gentle shock came to the heart of each ; feebly it fluttered and sank low. " Oh, wife ! " sighed the old man, and reached out his hand for hers.

The Silver Man lay still in the folds of the net, and looked at them with a wise

and quiet gaze. "What would you have of me?" he said, and his voice was far off and low.

They said, "Bring us into the land of Returning Time."

The Silver Man said: "Only once can you go there, and once return."

They both answered "We wish once to go there, and once return."

So he promised them that they should have the whole of their request; and they unloosed him from the net, and landed all together on the further bank.

Up the hill they went, following the track of the Silver Man. Presently they reached its crest; and there before them lay all the howling winter of the world.

The Silver Man turned his face and looked back; and looking back it became all young, and ruddy, and bright. The ferryman and his wife gazed at him, both speechless at the wonderful change. He took their hands, making them turn the way by which they had come; below their feet was a deep black gulf, and beyond and away lay nothing but a dark starless hollow of air.

"Now," said their guide, "you have but

to step forward one step, and you shall be in the land of Returning Time."

They loosed hold of his hands, joined clasp, husband with wife, and at one step upon what seemed gulf beneath their feet, found themselves in a green and flowery land. There were perfumed valleys and grassy hills, whose crops stretched down before the breeze; thick fleecy clouds crossed their tops, and overhead, amid a blue air rang the shrill trilling of birds. Behind lay, fading mistily as a dream, the bare world they had left; and fast on his forward road, growing small to them from a distance, went the Silver Man, a shining point on the horizon.

The ferryman and his wife looked, and saw youth in each other's faces beginning to peep out through the furrows of age; each step they took made them grow younger and stronger; years fell from them like worn-out rags as they went down into the valleys of the land of Returning Time.

How fast Time returned! Each step made the change of a day, and every mile brought them five years back toward youth. When they came down to the streams that ran in the bed of each valley, the ferryman

and his wife felt their prime return to them. He saw the gold come back into her locks, and she the brown into his. Their lips became open to laughter and song. "Oh, how good," they cried, "to have lived all our lives poor, to come at last to this!"

They drank water out of the streams, and tasted the fruit from the trees that grew over them; till presently, being tired for mere joy, they lay down in the grass to rest. They slept hand within hand and cheek against cheek, and, when they woke, found themselves quite young again, just at the age when they were first married in the years gone by.

The ferryman started up and felt the desire of life strong in his blood. "Come!" he said to his wife, "or we shall become too young with lingering here. Now we have regained our youth, let us go back into the world once more!"

His wife hung upon his hand, "Are we not happy enough," she asked, "as it is? Why should we return?"

"But," he cried, "we shall grow too young; now we have youth and life at its best let us return! Time goes too fast with us; we are in danger of it carrying us away."

She said no further word, but followed up toward the way by which they had entered. And yet, in spite of her wish to remain, as she went her young blood frisked. Presently coming to the top of a hill, they set off running and racing ; at the bottom they looked at each other, and saw themselves boy and girl once more.

“ We have stayed here too long ! ” said the ferryman, and pressed on.

“ Oh, the birds,” sighed she, “ and the flowers, and the grassy hills to run on, we are leaving behind ! ” But still the boy had the wish for a man’s life again, and urged her on ; and still with every step they grew younger and younger. At length, two small children, they came to the border of that enchanted land, and saw beyond the world bleak and wintry and without leaf. Only a further step was wanted to bring them face to face once more with the hard battle of life.

Tears rose in the child-wife’s eyes : “ If we go,” she said, “ we can never return ! ” Her husband looked long at her wistful face ; he, too, was more of a child now, and was forgetting his wish to be a man again.

He took hold of her hand and turned

round with her, and together they faced once more the flowery orchards, and the happy watered valleys.

Away down there light streams tinkled, and birds called. Downwards they went, slowly at first, then with dancing feet, as with shoutings and laughter they ran.

Down into the level fields they ran ; their running was turned to a toddling ; their toddling to a tumbling ; their tumbling to a slow crawl upon hands and feet among the high grass and flowers ; till at last they were lying side by side, curled up into a cuddly ball, chuckling and dimpling and crowing to the insects and birds that passed over them.

Then they heard the sweet laughter of Father Time ; and over the hill he came, young, ruddy, and shining, and gathered them up sound asleep on the old boat by the ferry.

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